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Strategic Negligence: Why the United States Failed to Provide Military Support to the Syrian Resistance in 2011-2014

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Strategic Negligence:
Why the United States Failed to Provide
Military Support to the Syrian Resistance in 2011-2014

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the following:

First, to the Syrian people, the hundreds of thousands that have died and the more than ten million – half the country’s population – that have been displaced from their homes. The US could and should have done more to prevent or mitigate this catastrophe.

Second, to the US diplomats and embassy employees in Damascus during the early years of the rebellion, and, in subsequent years, the US Special Operations Forces operators on the ground in Syria, who worked to assist the Syrian people through this crisis.

Third, to my wife, Libby, who endured four years of “strategic negligence” as I toiled with this Ph.D. program and dissertation.

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Lieutenant General Charles Cleveland, US Army retired, was the senior Special Forces (Green Beret) commander during most of this 2011-2014 period and was an inspiration both throughout this conflict period and also during the writing of this dissertation. As an intellect and visionary, he ranks with the likes of William (Wild Bill)

Donovan and Aaron Bank, and similar to Ambassador Ford, his full story has not yet been told.

Special thanks to Dr. Christopher Lamb, former director of policy planning in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict and to Major General William E. Rapp, U.S. Army retired, former Commandant at the U.S. Army War College. Both of these senior officials provided unique insights into the structural-functionalism of the SOF organization and of its institutional culture within the larger conventional military institution.

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Finally, I commend the *Institute for the Study of War* for their professionalism, innovation, and creative information collection, analysis, and production. During this 2011 to 2014 period, this small but high performing research institute outperformed portions of the US intelligence community at a true fraction of the cost.

While acknowledging all of this support and assistance, any errors of omission or commission in this dissertation are entirely my own.

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ABSTRACT

The US military's culture, structure, and process for providing advice to the president and his national security decision-making team are flawed due to the marginalization of unconventional warfare (UW) expertise -- UW is the military's doctrinal term for support to resistance activities and movements. This marginalization results in inadequate consideration for applying UW as a strategic option for the nation.

Through a qualitative methods case study analysis utilizing macro- and micro-level process-tracing with a conceptual framework based on Niklas Luhmann's Systems Theory, the author shows that viable and acceptable resistance elements existed in Syria in March 2011 to June 2014 and that the conventional US military failed to recognize this development, adequately analyze its implications, and craft a strategic UW option for the national security decision-makers to consider.

This finding is significant in that it exposes a deficiency in the US military's culture, structure and process that results in an incomplete and insufficient menu of military options for the president. If these cultural, structural, and procedural flaws are left unaddressed, the US is likely to repeat this strategic error in the future.

The author identifies specific recommendations for national security practitioners; however, the overarching theme is the need to change the institutional culture and the old structures of the conventional military to be able to provide the president a more complete, comprehensive, and creative menu of options to consider when assessing and responding to violent political crises short of conventional war.

INTRODUCTION

“What often appears to be a personality-driven or political debate between the commander-in-chief and his strong-minded military advisors actually has deeper institutional and cultural roots. The ‘professional’ military officer has certain expectations about how to craft ‘best military advice’ for the president that are deeply embedded into the organizational culture and in fact hard-wired into the institutionalized and incredibly detailed military planning process.... Ultimately, the output of the military’s planning process fails to deliver the type of nuanced advice in the form of creative options that the president needs.”

--Janine Davidson, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans from 2009-2012¹

The Syrian rebellion in the period of March 2011 to June 2014 can be viewed on three distinct levels with one unifying theme that penetrates and links all three.

The first level is geostrategic. During this period, an opportunity existed to disrupt the strategic partnership of Iran, Syria, and Lebanese Hizballah by supporting non-terrorist resistance elements within Syria that sought to overthrow the Bashar al-Assad regime and, by implication, break the weapons supply routes between Iran and

¹ Janine Davidson, “The Contemporary Presidency: Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making: Explaining the Broken Dialogue”, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 43 no.1, March 2013, 129.

Lebanese Hizballah.² Moreover, as the rebellion evolved into a civil war, the existence of significant chemical weapons – and their use by the Assad regime – compounded the geostrategic and realism view to this crisis.

The second level is counterterrorism. During this same period, what began as a grassroots, non-terrorist, resistance movement quickly became violent. During the latter portions of this time frame, the terrorist groups of al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) grew in strength and capabilities at the expense of the non-terrorist resistance elements. With the fall of Mosul in June 2014, ISIS had established their caliphate in western and northern Iraq plus eastern Syria.

The third level is humanitarian. The rebellion morphed into a civil war with foreign intervention by Iran, Iranian-sponsored Shia militias from Iraq, Lebanese Hizballah, and Russia. By 2016 several hundred thousand people had died and ten million others were refugees or internally displaced.³

One unifying theme penetrates and links all three of these levels: the lack of an effective strategic response from the United States.

What was the US response? This dissertation will show a very activity engaged and committed US State Department. The dissertation will also show feckless US military planning and options. Within the National Security Council and interagency process, this divergence became apparent to the key participants.

² For a more thorough examination of this strategic partnership between Iran, Syria, and Hizballah, see Mohsen Milani, "Why Tehran Won't Abandon Assad(ism)," *The Washington Quarterly* 36:4 (Fall 2013): 79-93.

³ Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Deconstructing Syria: A Confederal Approach," published September 16, 2016, accessed November 4, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/deconstructing-syria-a-confederal-approach/>

The president recognized that the situation in Syria was not a problem that the US military could solve by itself. He also did not want to involve the US in another conventional military invasion of another country; Afghanistan and Iraq were enough. The president knew that working with the local Sunni population was the best way to both fight the Islamic State and unseat the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad – or to at least coerce the regime to transition the government and hold free elections.⁴ Yet no such option for providing military support to the Syrian resistance was provided by the US military through the National Security Council to the president. With a conventional military invasion off the table, the US military could muster no sufficient options to satisfy the president. Limited airstrikes, maritime interdiction, refugee safe zones, and secured humanitarian corridors would not be effective in driving Assad from office, defeating ISIS, or in resolving the humanitarian crisis. Yet those were the only military options provided to the president.⁵

As Janine Davidson, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans from 2009-2012 wrote, “Ultimately, the output of the military’s planning process fails to deliver the type of nuanced advice in the form of creative options that the president needs.”⁶

Senior leaders of the US military – a very conventional force -- complained that no one could satisfactorily identify the various disjointed elements of the Syrian

⁴ Interview with President Barack Obama by Steve Kroft, *60 Minutes*, which aired October 11, 2015 and was accessed February 5, 2016, <http://cbsnews.com/news/president-obama-60-minutes-syria-isis-2016-presidential-race>.

⁵ *The Situation in Syria, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate*, 100th Congress, 2nd session (March 7, 2012), accessed September 23, 2014, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsy/pkg/CHRG-112shrg76271/html/CHRG-112shrg7621.htm>.

⁶ Janine Davidson, “The Contemporary Presidency”, 129.

resistance, that is, the resistance did not present itself in an organized form from which a central military leadership could be recognized and partnered with to receive US weapons, ammunition, and training. Yet at the very same time, the US ambassador in Damascus was training, advising, assisting, and equipping 1,500 Syrian political activists – inside Syria, not expatriates in Europe – to build a network of activism that consisted of strengthening local councils, civil society groups, free media, lawyers' union, and private radio stations.⁷

As this dissertation will show, viable and acceptable resistance elements did exist. The State Department was actively working with them – the leaders were known. Moreover, using data and analysis published contemporary to this March 2011 to June 2014 period, even civilian research institutes and academics knew that a viable and acceptable Syrian opposition existed. Indeed, some research institutions and non-governmental organizations were communicating with these resistance force leaders.

This dissertation will show that the US military did not provide any viable options to directly support this resistance movement during this critical period of March 2011 to June 2014.

I do not argue that supporting the resistance would have “won the war” in Syria. Rather, this dissertation is about strategic negligence; the negligence to provide a full menu of military options to the National Security Council (NSC) principals, the president included.

The questions become: Why and how does the best military in the history of the world get to the point where it can provide only conventional military options, and when

⁷ *US Policy Toward Syria*. Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. 113th Congress, April 11, 2013, 11.

the conventional options do not fit, the US military is unable to provide any useful and creative options, despite the subject of “unconventional warfare” or “military support to resistance activities” being part of the US Army’s doctrinal mission set for decades?⁸ How and why does this happen? Answering these questions is the thrust of this dissertation.

The US military is obligated by law to provide the president its “best military advice”. That should include a complete menu of options, not just those constrained to only conventional options like a modern day Maginot Line.⁹

To more formally introduce this dissertation, I will preview the research question, hypothesis, conceptual or theoretical framework, key questions, and show how this dissertation adds to the existing body of knowledge. I conclude this introduction with a brief preview of the chapters.

The research question asks: Why and how did the US military miss the opportunity to provide military support to a viable and acceptable Syrian resistance in the March 2011 to June 2014 period?

My hypothesis is that the US military’s culture, structure, and process for providing advice to the president and his national security decision-making team are flawed due to the marginalization of unconventional warfare (UW) expertise. By

⁸ The terms “unconventional warfare” (UW) and “military support to resistance activities” will be fully defined in chapter one. For now, suffice it to say that UW is the military’s doctrinal term for “military support to resistance activities” and that the terms are essentially synonymous.

⁹ The Maginot Line was an extensive and fortified defensive belt built by the French after World War I to deter, defend, and defeat another German invasion. However, when the Germans invaded again in World War II, they simply bypassed this extensive and expensive defensive system with a flanking attack through Belgium. Since then the term Maginot Line has referred to strategies or investments based on the experience of the previous war that are not applicable to the next conflict.

organizational structure and function – rooted in organizational culture – the UW experts are literally assigned to organizations that exercise little to no role in major operational decision-making; hence, the marginalization. The result is inadequate consideration for applying UW as a strategic option for the nation.

The conceptual framework for this dissertation is based on Niklas Luhmann's Systems Theory that addresses complexity and a system or organization's response to such challenges. This will be reviewed in much more detail in chapters one and two, but for now suffice it to say that the organizational or institutional biases within the conventional US military precluded or at least obstructed any serious considerations for strategic options to support the Syrian resistance movement.

To be sure, there are plausible rival hypotheses, and these are addressed within this dissertation. The first rival hypothesis is the president provided guidance that pre-empted any consideration of military support to the resistance, or unconventional warfare using the military's doctrinal term. A variant to this first rival hypothesis specifically highlights the then-secret negotiations with the Iranians over their nuclear development program as the rationale for the president to direct his defense and military leaders to not consider any such military option for Syria that could arguably derail these negotiations with Iran. The second rival hypothesis states that the Department of Defense (DoD) leaders themselves deliberately suppressed some US options, perhaps due to either a desire to gather and preserve military resources in anticipation of a possible war with Iran or out of a more general war-weariness after years of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. This dissertation shows where the evidence supports or counters these competing hypotheses.

I show in this dissertation that the primary hypothesis is correct – this is indeed where, on balance, the preponderance of the evidence exists. However, there are still, classified papers, briefings, and studies that could provide more evidence to any of these hypotheses. Over time, these materials will be declassified and future researchers can review this dissertation’s findings in that new light. Moreover, the new evidence may show that although the rival hypotheses were not valid, they contained elements of fact and analysis that would add to a richer understanding of the actual causal mechanisms inherent in the original hypothesis. To this end, I anxiously await the future researchers’ works.

The three key questions inherent in the investigation that links the research question to the hypothesis and conclusions are:

- Was there a viable and acceptable resistance force in Syria in the period March 2011 to June 2014?
- If so, why and how did the US miss the opportunity to train, advise, and equip them?
- What are the resulting recommendations for national security practitioners?

This dissertation adds to the existing body of knowledge by exposing a deficiency in the military’s culture, structure, and process for providing advice to the president and his national security decision-making team. This deficiency is a cultural, structural, and process flaw that marginalizes the military’s expertise associated with supporting resistance movements. As the early years of the Syrian rebellion demonstrated, there are crises, contingencies, and events in the world that are not conducive to being solved

by conventional military operations. At the same time, doing nothing is often not a good option either. More to the point, however, the US military has a niche capability within its small Special Forces ranks that is trained, equipped, and professionalized with a career path to plan, coordinate, and execute such options. But by structure, process, and institutional culture of the conventional military, this expertise is marginalized. Thus, this dissertation provides policy-relevant research that illuminates this deficiency and, by implication, argues for its remedy.

Chapter one provides the research design for the dissertation. At its core, this is a qualitative methods single case study with macro- and micro-level process-tracing. The conceptual framework is based on Niklas Luhmann's Systems Theory that addresses complexity and an organization's responses to such challenges. Primary source evidence included Congressional testimonies and memoirs from the key participants in the decision-making, public statements from the White House and State Department, plus interviews with senior leaders who participated in the decision-making or were intimately familiar with the military's culture, structure, and process concerning unconventional warfare.

Chapter two provides the literature review that examines the previous academic research that underpins the theoretical and conceptual framework of the dissertation.

Chapter three addresses the first of the three key questions: Was there a viable and acceptable non-terrorist resistance force in Syria during the period March 2011 to June 2014? Using source material contemporary to that period, including photos, videos, and social media coupled with analysis graphically displayed on maps, the reader can clearly see that such a resistance force existed. More significantly, any

military staff officer or intelligence analyst could and should have seen this same information during this period.

Chapter four addresses the second of the three key questions: Why and how did the US miss the opportunity to train, advise, and equip this resistance? I first review the evolving US policy and strategy at the time, and then process-trace the key national security decision-making concerning the military options. I then more directly address the questions of how and why the US made its decisions. This analysis is based on Luhmann's Systems Theory. To answer the "how" portion I used a systems theory approach to examine the military decision-making process for providing inputs to the National Security Council (NSC). This approach revealed the inherent flaws for developing military support to resistance activities – also known as "unconventional warfare" options by marginalizing such experts from the key operational positions in the decision-making. To answer the "why" portion, I showed that the conventional senior military leaders, in accordance with Luhmann's theory, are prone to see and react to developments in their environments that make sense only from their autopoiesis-based frame of reference. In other words, they are biased towards providing conventional warfare solutions.

The third of the three key questions concerns the resulting recommendations for national security practitioners, but before I address that final question I consider the counter-arguments, plausible rival hypotheses, and synthesize those results. For if the analysis that answers the first two questions is faulty, the third question becomes spurious. So in chapter five I present the counter-arguments, an analysis of the plausible rival hypotheses (showing where and how well the evidence supports each),

and then synthesize the results. The synthesis reveals and highlights a unique factor concerning the role of “contact teams” to assess the resistance force. The significance of this factor becomes a driving force in analyzing the recommendations of this study for national security practitioners.

Chapter six addresses these recommendations, which focus on cultural, structural, and process changes to address the deficiencies highlighted in chapter four. The recommendations extend beyond this linear thinking, however, to more holistically address the strategic nature of this issue; for example, what considerations should be given to expanding the strategic partnership between the State Department, CIA, the US Special Operations Command, and the private sector concerning joint planning, coordination, and execution of support to resistance activities?

In summary, the US military’s culture, structure, and process for providing advice to the president and his national security decision-making team are flawed due to the marginalization of its own unconventional warfare -- or military support to resistance activities -- expertise. This marginalization results in inadequate consideration for applying unconventional warfare as a strategic option for the nation. If these cultural, structural, and procedural flaws are left unaddressed, the US is likely to repeat this strategic error in the future.

The research design that provides the basis for this dissertation is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER ONE:

RESEARCH DESIGN¹⁰

--“What these studies show is a decline in ...’old war’ – that is to say, war involving states in which battle is the decisive encounter.... New wars involve networks of state and non-state actors and most violence is directed against civilians....New wars...are wars in which the difference between internal and external is blurred; they are both global and local and they are different both from classic inter-state wars and classic civil wars.

--“In the context of spending cuts, there is a tendency for governments to cut the very capabilities most suitable for addressing new wars and to protect their capabilities for fighting old wars.

--“It turned out to be very difficult to change the culture of the (US) military.”

-----Mary Kaldor, *New War Theory*¹¹

At its core, this dissertation concerns the US military’s decision-making process and its inability to effectively generate strategic options for the national security decision-makers that involve support to resistance movements. The early years of the Syrian rebellion provide the venue or the case for this analysis. Given the unit of

¹⁰ Portions of this chapter appeared in earlier papers submitted during coursework at the University of South Florida. Specifically, POS 6933 PhD Capstone in the Spring Semester of 2017 and POS 6707 Qualitative Methods in the Fall Semester 2016.

¹¹ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 3rd ed., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), vi-vii.

analysis as the US military's decision-making process concerning supporting to resistance elements, with Syria as the case, this dissertation illuminates how exactly this decision-making structure, process, and culture failed to work effectively by marginalizing expertise in supporting resistance activities. This can best be described as a "pathway case" (Gerring, 2007) where causal effects can be isolated from other potentially confounding factors indicating its uniquely penetrating insight into causal mechanisms.¹²

Acknowledging this focus, I utilize the qualitative methods technique of a single case study with macro- and micro-level process-tracing. Primary source evidence included Congressional testimonies and memoirs from the key participants in the decision-making, public statements from the White House and State Department, plus interviews with senior leaders participating in the decision-making or who were intimately familiar with the military's structure, process, and culture concerning support to resistance movements.

The major sections of this chapter are:

- Research question and unit of analysis
- Scope and frame
- Hypothesis
- Conceptual framework
- Substantive focus
- Concepts, definitions, and variables
- Plausible rival hypotheses

¹² John Gerring, "Is there a (Viable) Crucial-Case Method?" *Comparative Political Studies* Vol 40 Number 3, March 2007, Sage Publications, 238-239.

- The three key questions
- Methodology
- Data collection plan
- The contribution of the dissertation

Research Question and Unit of Analysis

The research question is: Why and how did the US military miss the opportunity to provide military support to viable and acceptable Syrian resistance elements in the March 2011 – June 2014 period?

The unit of analysis concerns the US military's decision-making structure, process, culture, and recommendations to the National Security Council (NSC) concerning support to resistance activities.

Scope and Frame

This dissertation is scoped and framed both temporally and functionally. The time period of March 2011 to June 2014 corresponds to the outbreak of the rebellion in Daraa in March 2011 and concludes when the US administration finally decided to provide military support to the resistance in June 2014. The fall of Mosul to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also occurred in June 2014, which finally triggered the US decision to become more militarily active in the region.

Functionally, this dissertation is limited to the US military's support to the resistance. The dissertation will not review or discuss any Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) involvement with resistance elements that may or may not have been occurring,

with the exception of the September 2012 NSC meeting where President Obama rejected a recommendation for the CIA to arm the resistance, only to reverse his decision the following year, as documented in the memoirs of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta.

Hypothesis:

The US military's culture, structure, and process for providing advice to the president and his national security decision-making team are flawed due to the marginalization of unconventional warfare expertise. This marginalization results in inadequate consideration for applying unconventional warfare as a strategic option for the nation.

Conceptual Framework

This dissertation concerns the US military's culture, structure, and decision-making process and its inability to generate strategic options for the national security decision-makers that involve support to resistance movements. Consequently, the theoretical or conceptual framework of this dissertation concerns national security decision-making -- not resistance movements and not revolutions. More broadly, this concerns systems theory. The core theoretical basis for this study is Niklas Luhmann's Systems Theory (Luhmann, 2002) that recognizes and addresses complexity and a system's or organization's tendency to reproduce or reinforce its own structure and activities rather than to more openly or holistically address the challenge of change. This focus from Luhmann on complexity and an organization's processing of complexity

is significantly more advanced than earlier systems theorists' work that tended to focus on structural-functionalism and relatively simple input and output designs. Moreover, Luhmann suggests that when an organization has established a mechanism to reduce uncertainty, other alternative options are likely to be discarded. As such, Luhmann's approach to system theory and its work with complexity is more applicable to today's national security environment than the earlier simplistic theories.

There are several main components to Luhmann's theory that I highlight in relation to this dissertation: autopoiesis, complexity, rationality, communications, and decisions.

Autopoiesis, literally meaning self-production or creation, refers to a system or organization that reproduces or maintains itself or its boundaries like a biological cell. Luhmann stripped away the biological depiction and instead emphasized the reflective and self-reproductive nature of this action for systems or organizations.¹³ Luhmann further argued that the environment is a distinct element that exists outside or beyond the boundaries of the autopoiesis system. How well the system or organization could recognize and respond to developments in the environment, especially with the organization's desire to continue to reproduce itself in its current image, bears a strong resemblance to how the US military would respond – or not respond – to resistance activities in Syria.

Likewise, Luhmann's writings on complexity provide an interesting lens to view the Syria case. Luhmann argues that a system or organization "bundles" complex developments in the environment and then undertakes indifference or other

¹³ Niklas Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, trans. Peter Gilgen (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), viii-xiv.

arrangements to deal with this complexity. The system engages in a “reduction of complexity” by ignoring or treating the new developments with a template or design that it previously experienced under different conditions.¹⁴ Consequently, the organization is not fully seeing, understanding, and then developing appropriate responses to the new development – exactly the same three verbs I will use in the formulation of the variables for this dissertation. Instead, the system or organization has a “tendency to limit the problem to the question of the arrangements that a system has at its disposal.”¹⁵

In his discussion on rationality, Luhmann posits that systems or organizations will avoid or exclude developments that are deemed risky before they then rationally evaluate possible response options. In Luhmann’s words, there is “always a non-rational zone outside the marked space” for rational consideration.¹⁶ This comment provides a strong segue for a subsequent discussion on Alex Mintz’ theory of decision-making in upcoming paragraphs.

Luhmann advocated that one should treat communications and not actions as the elements of a social system.¹⁷ Within the concept of autopoiesis, Luhmann considered communications as essential for the system or organization to reproduce or reinforce itself.¹⁸ The flow of information, from recognition, to understanding, and to crafting responses, all underscore the significance of communications, or the transmission and reception of information, to shaping decision-making for an

¹⁴ Ibid., 121.

¹⁵ Ibid., 124.

¹⁶ Ibid., 136.

¹⁷ David Seidl, *Luhmann’s Theory of Autopoietic Social Systems* (Munich: University of Munich School of Management, 2004), 11.

¹⁸ Ibid.

organization or system. This flow of information will be the focus of the process-tracing methodology used to examine the decision-making associated with the Syrian rebellion.

Luhmann considered organizations as social systems that would reproduce themselves on the basis of their internal decisions.¹⁹ Based upon the organization's processing of information, the organization would decide what actions to take and these decisions would shape the conditions for future decisions or adaptation. Thus, decision would form a precedent for shaping future decisions and adaptations.

Together, Luhmann's systems theory with the inherent concepts of autopoiesis, complexity, rationality, communications, and decisions provide a strong conceptual framework for this dissertation

Luhmann acknowledges that his theory is highly abstract.²⁰ To provide a bridge, pathway, or connective tissue between Luhmann's theory and the very pragmatic (perhaps dogmatic) military decision-making process, I use Alex Mintz' theory of foreign policy decision-making in a supporting role to Luhmann. Mintz' theory of foreign policy decision-making sequentially integrates cognitive and rational theories.²¹ As Mintz describes it, there are two general schools of thought for foreign policy decision-making: rationale choice and cognitive psychology. Mintz integrates both of these approaches by stating that decision-makers actually use a two-stage process that first eliminates alternatives with unacceptable returns (the cognitive psychology approach) and then analyzes the remaining options with the clear risk-gain lens (rational decision-making). This first stage process that eliminates options or ideas from a subsequent round of

¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁰ Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, 7.

²¹ Alex Mintz, ed., *Integrating Cognitive and Rationale Theories of Foreign Policy Decision Making* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

“rationale” decision-making strongly supports and is illustrative of Luhmann’s systems theory. I review this in more detail in the literature review chapter.

In the case of the early years of the Syrian rebellion, these structural, process, and organizational cultural factors formed a “glaucoma” that precluded a full vision, understanding, and response from the US military to the National Security Council.²²

Substantive Focus:

Figure 1 is an overly simplistic view of national security decision-making concerning military support to resistance activities. Acknowledging Luhmann’s Systems Theory, which better captures the complexities of systems and decision-making, this sketch does concisely convey a simplistic structure of decision-making. As Luhmann would immediately inject, however, this simplistic view of the Intelligence Community, State Department, and Defense Department inputs on the left side of this chart are, in fact, each separate systems and environments that provide their inputs to the NSC. Nevertheless, Figure 1 is a simple way to quickly orient the reader to the NSC decision-making process.

²² This concept of a “theoretical glaucoma” is taken from Mohsen M. Milani’s *The Making of Iran’s Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 10. As Dr. Milani used the term, he highlighted that there was no lack of information that foretold the *ulama*’s ultimate victory; rather, there was a “theoretical glaucoma” that precluded a proper view and understanding of the situation. Likewise, in the case of the early years of the Syrian rebellion, the information on the resistance was abundantly available, but failed to be understood and processed into feasible options by the US military.

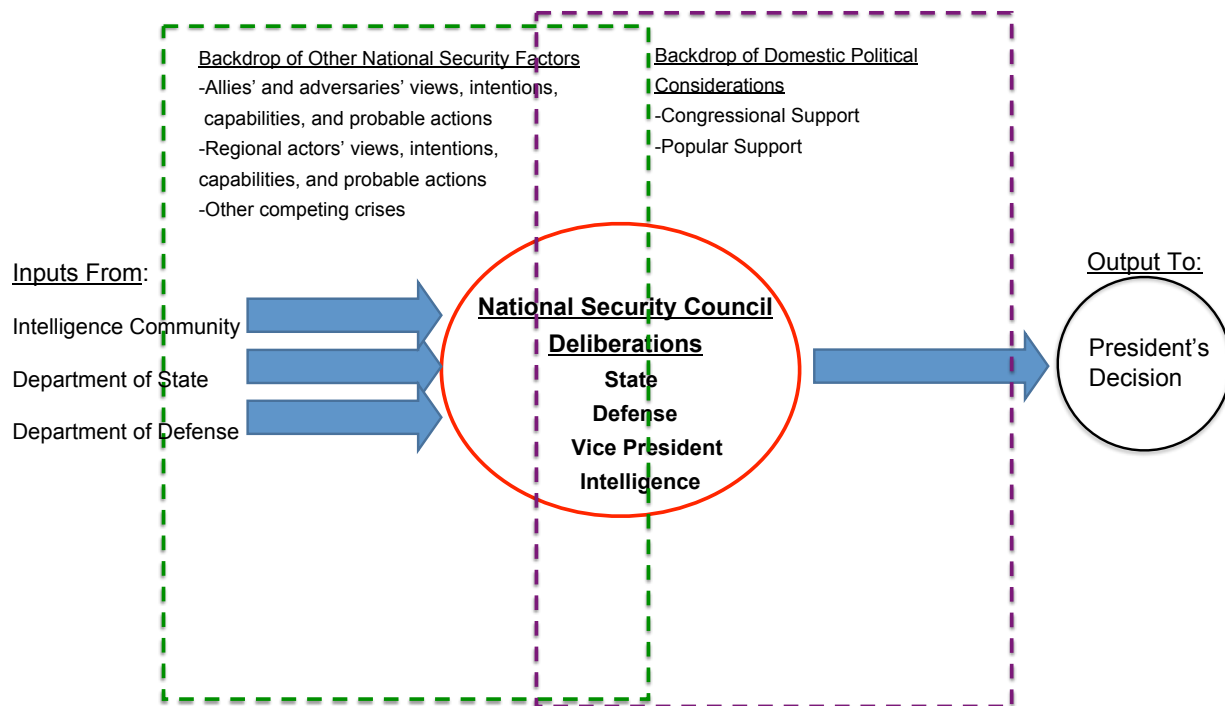


Figure 1: National Security Decision-Making on Military Support to Resistance Activities (MSRA) Post-9/11
The Broad Aperture View

The substantive focus is on the unit of analysis (the US military's decision-making structure, process, culture, and recommendations to the NSC concerning support to resistance activities) and the environment and culture in the national security enterprise that are relevant to limiting or marginalizing UW inputs. At the macro-level, depicted in Figure 1, the output is the President's decision to provide the military support to the resistance or not, or some variant of limited support in between. As the figure shows, the President's decision-making is influenced by many actors and events, including inputs from the Intelligence Community, Department of State, and Department of Defense against the backdrop of many international factors. There is also a backdrop of domestic political considerations, again depicted in the figure, but with the

important understanding that the National Security Council (NSC) is the entity that reviews, analyzes, and synthesizes all of the information and various options and then presents a consolidated recommendation to the President for his decision. To this end, this case study on Syria provides limited generalizations that will be useful to inform this broader framework and process for national security decision-making.

Next, when the aperture is then narrowed to examine only the military's inputs into this larger process, we can isolate useful variables and steps that allow a more focused case study examination of the military's decision-making process for supporting resistance movements, and in this specific case concerning the early years of the Syrian rebellion. Figure 2 depicts this more narrow and focused view on the military's decision making. As shown, the independent variable, for the specific case of Syrian resistance, is the ability to *See and Understand the Resistance Activity and Potential*. The intervening variable is *Develop Military Support to Resistance Activities (MSRA) Options*. The Dependent Variable is then *Gain Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (C/JCS) and Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Approval and Submit the Options to the National Security Council (NSC)*.

Figure 2 then is a key part of the research design and operationalization. This is how exactly and concretely I assess the problem of marginalization of unconventional warfare (UW) knowledge, expertise, and input into national security decision-making.

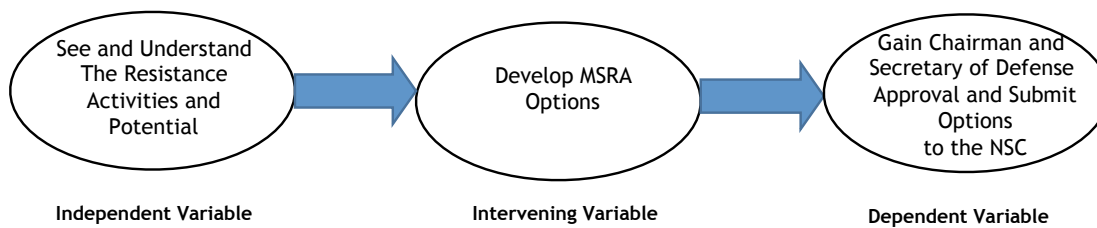


Figure 2: National Security Decision-Making on
Military Support to Resistance Activities (MSRA) Post-9/11
The Narrow Aperture View

Concepts, Definitions, and Variables:

There are two parts to this section. The first section will define terms whose definitions are essential to understanding the dissertation, like the nuanced but critical difference between *Special Operations Forces (SOF)* and *Special Forces (SF)*. The second section focuses on defining the independent, intervening, and dependent variables in both nominal and operational terms.

Key Terms Defined

Unconventional Warfare and Military Support to Resistance Activities

The following terms are essential to fully comprehend the various elements of the dissertation. The term *Unconventional Warfare (UW)* is essentially synonymous with *Military Support to Resistance Activities (MSRA)*. UW is a military term defined by the Department of Defense (DoD) as, “Activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.”²³ In simpler terms, UW is political, economic, and military support to resistance activities or a resistance movement. Resistance movements could include insurgents, militants, and other irregular armed political groups. There are also non-violent resistance movements, like the resistance movement within Serbia that unseated Milosevic from power in 2000.

With regards to the issue of which resistance groups the US should support, a key determinant would be sufficient overlap or commonality of the goals and objectives of the resistance group with the US national security interests. Other factors to consider include analyzing if the resistance group has the capability of achieving the objectives and if it will operate within the expected norms of warfare, i.e. the group will not engage in terrorist tactics.

In this dissertation I use both terms: UW when the discussion is focused on the internal US military deliberations, MSRA when the discussion emphasizes the broader US interagency (e.g., State Department, CIA, others). Those distinctions make for

²³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-05, *Special Operations*, July 16, 2014, GL-12.

nuanced differences; however, the two terms are essentially synonymous. To avoid confusion, I often use the combined acronym of MSRA/UW in this dissertation.

Special Operations Forces (SOF) and Special Forces (SF)

Special Operations Forces (SOF) are forces from the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations, which include UW, direct action kill/capture raids, and special reconnaissance.²⁴ However, not all SOF are trained, organized, and focused on UW. The primacy for UW resides with the Army's Special Operations Forces, and more specifically, its sub-set of the Special Forces community, more commonly known as the nation's Green Berets.

Special Forces (SF) are Army special operations personnel who are "organized, trained, and equipped to conduct special operations with an emphasis on UW capabilities."²⁵ This is the only element within the US military uniquely focused on UW.

Viable and Acceptable Resistance

This phrase "viable and acceptable resistance" holds a prominent role in the research question and helps to frame the resulting analysis. I will parse, define, and carefully describe each of these words

Viable means feasible or capable of working successfully; in this case, capable of successfully executing unconventional warfare. I have already provided the definition of unconventional warfare as activities to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or

²⁴ Ibid., GL-11.

²⁵ Ibid., GL-10.

with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area. So, in the Syrian context, viable refers to having that capability to successfully disrupt, coerce, or overthrow the Assad regime. Keeping in mind that the words “disrupt, coerce, or overthrow” are on a spectrum of their own, a resistance force that is not yet able to overthrow the Assad regime, but one that can still disrupt it, is still, by definition, a viable resistance force. Moreover, once US support, like weapons, ammunition, and training, is provided to such a resistance force, one would expect to see the capabilities of the resistance force expand from simple disruption to coercion and then overthrow.

Acceptable means suitable or allowed. In this case, an “acceptable” resistance force would need to meet three criteria. First, the interests and objectives of the resistance force must align with interests and objectives of the US. This does not necessarily mean that the resistance force likes or supports the US, only that the interests and objectives align. So, to the extent that the US sought to seek the removal of the Assad regime and the resistance force did as well, then this first criteria is met regardless of whether the rebels were pro-US or not. Second, the political end state of the resistance could not contradict US values; i.e., the resistance force could not strive to establish a dictatorship while receiving US support. Third, the resistance force could not use terrorist tactics, i.e. deliberately targeting civilians for political affects on a different entity, normally the governing or occupying power. (The definition and description of terrorism is discussed in the next section.)

While the term resistance has many variants, most support the idea of an organized political opposition to a governing or occupying power. Often this political opposition, or at least core elements of it, must remain clandestine or underground to

avoid arrest from the governing or occupying power. This organized political opposition – and the term “organized” spans a spectrum of various degrees from incipient to highly organized – could espouse violent and/or nonviolent measures in its resistance activities. Violent political struggles are not uncommon in the history of the world or in the development of freedom or liberty for oppressed groups.

Within the context of violent resistance, however, one must draw a distinction between terrorism and non-terrorism tactics.

Terrorism

There is no one universally agreed upon definition of *terrorism*. Section 2656f(d) of Title 22 of the United States Code defines terrorism as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.²⁶ The definition of terrorism from the US military is, “The unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political.”²⁷

Given this variance, I accept and use both the State and Defense Department definitions since this dissertation concerns the US interagency decision-making process. *The synthesis that I will emphasize, however, is the deliberate targeting of innocent men, women, and children for political effects on a different entity, normally the*

²⁶ United States Department of State, Legislative Requirements and Key Terms, accessed May 21, 2017 at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/65464.pdf>

²⁷ US Department of Defense, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: The Joint Staff, March 2017), accessed April 1, 2017 at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/dictionary.pdf

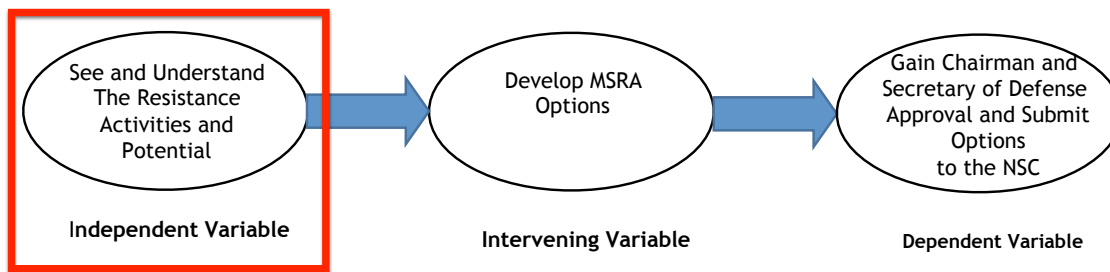
governing or occupying power. Of significance -- and this must be underscored -- a terrorist deliberately targets innocent people. Thus, detonating a car bomb in a crowded market place to deliberately target innocent civilians is a terrorist act. However, detonating a car bomb that deliberately targets a military checkpoint or soldiers is not a terrorist act. This latter act is undoubtedly unlawful and criminal from the perspective of the affected country, but this is not an act of terrorism. Likewise, a bombing that intentionally and deliberately targets a military position but unintentionally harms innocents is not a terrorist act – there was no deliberate attempt to target civilians. This distinction is significant and must be understood before progressing in the analysis presented in this dissertation.

Two non-Syrian examples illustrate this important point. Both Lebanese Hizballah and Hamas, although portraying and conducting themselves as resistance forces to Israeli occupation and activities, are also terrorist groups because at times they deliberately target civilians. Their attacks deliberately targeting civilians are not conducted by rogue commanders or units; rather, they are authorized and directed by senior leaders of these organizations.

For purposes of this dissertation, I draw a sharp line between the terrorist and non-terrorist resistance elements that operated in Syria in the March 2012 to June 2014 period. These will be clearly delineated and described in chapter three.

Defining the Variables in Nominal and Operational Terms

This second section focuses on defining the independent, intervening, and dependent variables in both nominal and operational terms.



Definition: The Combatant Command and Joint Staff respective J-2 sections directs, collects, analyzes, and reports assessments of the Syrian resistance to their J-3s, J-5s, and Commander/Chairman.

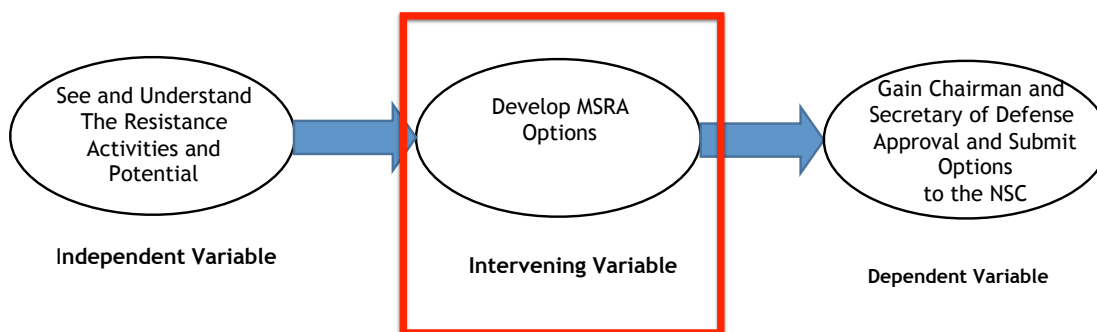
Operationalize:

1. Show the Combatant Command and Joint Staff intel assessment inputs provided to the planners. (Due to classification this will be unavailable.)
2. In the absence of the classified assessments, show assessments from others, to include those from the State Department and private organizations. In other words, show what was available to any entity (military or private) that was looking for it.)
3. Show testimony from the “consumers” of this data (e.g. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and how they described or assessed it.

Figure 3: Defining and Operationalizing the Independent Variable

The independent variable, as depicted in the above figure, is the ability to “See and Understand the Resistance Activity and Potential”. The nominal definition of this variable is “The Combatant Command and Joint Staff respective intelligence (J-2) sections direct, collect, analyze, and report assessments of the Syrian resistance to their operations officer (J-3), plans officer (J-5), and Commander/Chairman”. There are three critical elements or measurements to operationalize this definition:

1. Show the Combatant Command and Joint Staff intelligence assessment inputs provided to the planners. (Due to its security classification this assessment will be unavailable.)
2. In the absence of the classified assessments, show assessments from others, to include those from the State Department and private organizations. In other words, show what was available to any entity (military or private) that was looking for it.
3. Show testimony from the “consumers” of this data (e.g., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and how they described or assessed it.



Definition: The Combatant Command and Joint Staff respective J-5 sections conduct planning, which includes UW options, and presents recommendations to the Commander/Chairman.

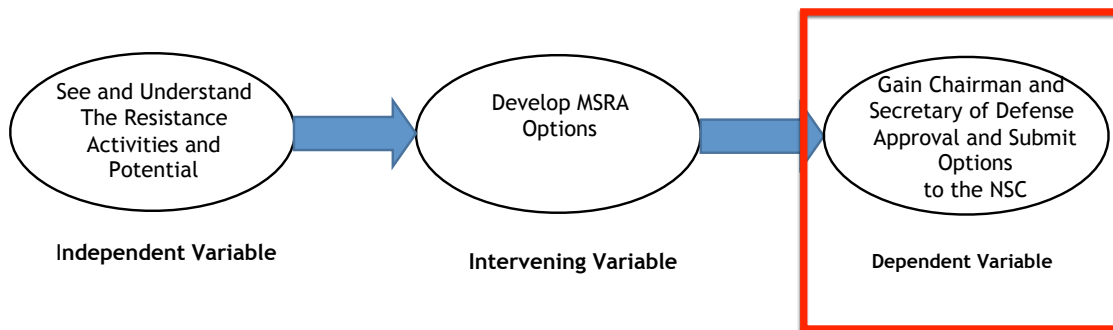
Operationalize:

1. Show the Combatant Command and Joint Staff planning products (i.e. staff estimates) provided to the Commander/Chairman. (Due to classification this will be unavailable.)
2. Show testimony from the “consumers” of this data (e.g. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and how they described or assessed it.

Figure 4: Defining and Operationalizing the Intervening Variable

The intervening variable, as depicted in the above figure, is “Develop Military Support to Resistance Activities (MSRA) Options”. The nominal definition of this variable is “The Combatant Command and Joint Staff respective plans (J-5) section conducts planning, which includes UW options, and presents recommendations to the Commander/Chairman”. There are two critical elements or measurements to operationalize this definition:

1. Show the Combatant Command and Joint Staff planning products (i.e., staff estimates) provided to the Commander/Chairman. (Due to its security classification this estimate will be unavailable.)
2. Show testimony from the “consumers” of this data (e.g., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and how they described or assessed it.



Definition: The Secretary of Defense, with advice from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, approves the planning and forwards it to the NSC for staff review and presidential approval

Operationalize:

1. Show the plans submission from DoD to the NSC. (Due to classification this will be unavailable.)
2. Show testimony from those who observed this event and had access to the information (e.g. the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Director of the CIA) and show how they described and assessed it.

Figure 5: Defining and Operationalizing the Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is then “Gain Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (C/JCS) and Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Approval and Submit the Options to the National Security Council (NSC)”. The nominal definition of this variable is “The Secretary of Defense, with advice from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, approves the planning and forwards it to the NSC for staff review and presidential approval”. There are two critical elements or measurements to operationalize this definition:

1. Show the plans submission from DoD to the NSC. (Due to its security classification this plan will be unavailable.)

2. Show testimony from those who observed this event and had access to the information (e.g. the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Director of the CIA) and show how they described and assessed it.

Plausible Rival Hypotheses

As identified earlier in this chapter, my hypothesis is that the US military structure and process for providing advice to the president and his national security decision-making team are flawed due to the marginalization of unconventional warfare expertise. This marginalization results in inadequate consideration for applying unconventional warfare as a strategic option for the nation.

However, there are two plausible rival hypotheses that need to be considered:

- Presidential guidance preempted any consideration of MSRA.
- DoD leaders deliberately suppressed the MSRA/UW option and did not present it to the NSC.

In chapter five I apply the evidence against each of these hypotheses.

Rival Hypothesis #1: Presidential Guidance Preempted any Consideration of MSRA.

Under this rival hypothesis, the president would have provided guidance to the NSC principals or military senior leaders to not consider any serious options or recommendations for military operations in Syria. I found no evidence to support this hypothesis, although it is true that the President was reluctant to get involved in Syria. The President disapproved the CIA Director's proposal to provide limited arms to the

resistance in September 2012, although the Secretaries of State and Defense endorsed the plan.²⁸ However, after the Assad regime used chemical weapons against his own people, the President changed his position and approved the CIA plan to arm the resistance in June 2013.²⁹ Despite the President's initial reluctance and subsequent approval to provide limited CIA arms to the resistance, there are no indications that he provided guidance to the military to not initiate any recommendation for a larger military support option. Given Clinton's and Panetta's disclosure and discussion of these debates in their memoirs, it seems unlikely they would avoid commenting on this presidential guidance to the military, if it occurred.

Variant to Rival Hypothesis One: The Iranian Negotiations Factor

A variant to this rival hypothesis concerns the initiation of the then confidential negotiations between the US, Iran, and others to limit Iran's development of nuclear capabilities in exchange for the relaxation of the economic sanctions. Under this scenario, the President would not want other areas of conflict to emerge between the US and Iran lest they disturb or otherwise adversely affect the ongoing negotiations. In this case too, however, I found no evidence supporting this option. That said, since absence-of-evidence is not evidence-of-absence, this remains an open question for future researchers. As the years pass, it is reasonable to expect at least some classified documents concerning this topic will be declassified and available to researchers.

²⁸ Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 463.

²⁹ Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 450.

Rival Hypothesis #2: DoD Leaders Deliberately Suppressed the UW Option

Under this rival hypothesis, there are two independent reasons why this would have been plausible. First, concern over a looming possible war with Iran, it could be speculated, would have caused the military leaders in the US Central Command and the Joint Staff to deliberately suppress the UW option so that they could husband the necessary military resources in advance of that possible conflict. Second, a more general war-weariness within the senior military ranks from years of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan could have led the military leaders to suppress any consideration to become involved in the Syrian conflict to include UW.

The Three Key Questions

Linking the research question to the hypothesis and conclusions are three key supporting questions that provide the framework for the main sections of this dissertation.

- Was there a viable and acceptable resistance force in Syria in the period March 2011 to June 2014?
- If so, why and how did the US miss the opportunity to train, advise, and equip them?
- What are the resulting recommendations for national security practitioners?

Methodology:

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (building on Arend Lijphart and Harry Eckstein's works) described six theory building approaches or objectives for qualitative

methods case studies.³⁰ Of those, the disciplined configurative case studies that use established theories to explain a case is the best frame for this dissertation. That said, if this single case study was expanded to include the other MSRM events, then the resulting larger research effort would fit the model of the “building block” study of phenomenon used to identify patterns for a broader set of conclusions, and this case and dissertation could be considered one of those building blocks. However, for purposes of this dissertation, the disciplined configurative case study approach is the proper frame, although I discuss this broader topic in the conclusion.

More specifically this dissertation is a single case study with macro- and micro-process-tracing to capture the complexity of the military inputs to the National Security Council decision-making. Primary source evidence included Congressional testimonies and memoirs from the key participants in the decision-making, plus public statements from the White House and State Department. Other primary source evidence included elite interviews with senior leaders participating in this decision-making or those who are subject matter experts in the cultural-institutional biases of the military.

To answer the “how” portion of the research question, I used a systems theory approach to examine the military decision-making process for providing inputs to the National Security Council (NSC). This approach revealed the inherent flaws for developing military support to resistance activities – also known as “unconventional warfare” options by marginalizing such experts from the key operational positions in the decision-making. To answer the “why” portion of the research question, I showed that

³⁰ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 74-76.

the conventional senior military leaders, in accordance with Luhmann's theory, are prone to see and react to developments in their environments that make sense only from their autopoiesis-based frame of reference. In other words, they are biased towards providing conventional warfare solutions.

Data Collection Plan:

There were four elements to the data collection plan: background research, detailed review of key decision-maker comments from their Congressional testimonies and memoirs, interviews of senior leaders involved in the decision-making, and the construction of process-trace charts that reveal the interconnectedness (or lack thereof) of the decision-making. These four parts are not purely sequential steps; rather, there is a necessary and advantageous overlap between these four elements.

First, the background research detail the existence of the moderate Syrian resistance movements during March 2011 to June 2014 exclusively using data contemporary to that period – in other words, showing the existence of the resistance movement with data that the US military and intelligence communities could and should have seen independent from any classified sources and methods. In addition, during this research phase I document the structural-functionalism and systems theory approaches of the military decision-making process.

Second, I researched and extracted comments from the key senior leaders involved in this decision-making. These leaders included the President, the Secretaries of State (Clinton and Kerry) and Defense (Gates, Panetta, and Hagel), the Chairman of

the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Mullen and Dempsey), and the US Ambassador to Syria (Ford).

Third, only after researching exactly what they said and when they said it, did I arrange and conduct interviews with some of the senior leaders that would have participated or at least observed this decision-making. This involved interviews with the US Ambassador to Syria at that time, Robert S. Ford, and retired Lieutenant General Charles Cleveland, who commanded the U.S. Army Special Operations Command during much of this period.

Fourth, given the data above, I constructed process-trace charts at two levels, macro and micro. First, I listed and categorized all major political and military events associated with the Syrian rebellion of March 2011 to June 2014, arranging them not just temporally but by categories of actions taken by Syrian actors (Assad regime, resistance elements) plus ISIS, actions by other states (minus the US) and international organizations, and actions by the US government to include internal decision-making events. These more than one hundred events, which are displayed in over thirty pages of charts found in Appendix A, constitute the macro-level process-tracing of this case study. Second, the analysis shows that seven of these events were particularly critical in terms of the US decision-making. I isolated each of these seven events and framed them as micro-level process-tracing which provided a timeline, identified the actors involved in the particular event, and analyzed their inputs to that decision-making event – in other words, who said what, where, when, why, and how.

An example chart is shown below – one that will be discussed in more detail in chapter four. In the below example of the micro-level process-trace, I highlight two

significant Congressional testimonies that occurred within one week of each other. In the first event, Ambassador Ford testifies that he was training and equipping 1500 local activists within Syria in how to organize and conduct their political resistance activities. Then, within a week of this event, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff testifies that he cannot “clearly identify the right people” in the resistance.³¹ Such a diverging assessment within the US government illuminates the deficiencies in the military’s inputs to the National Security Council.

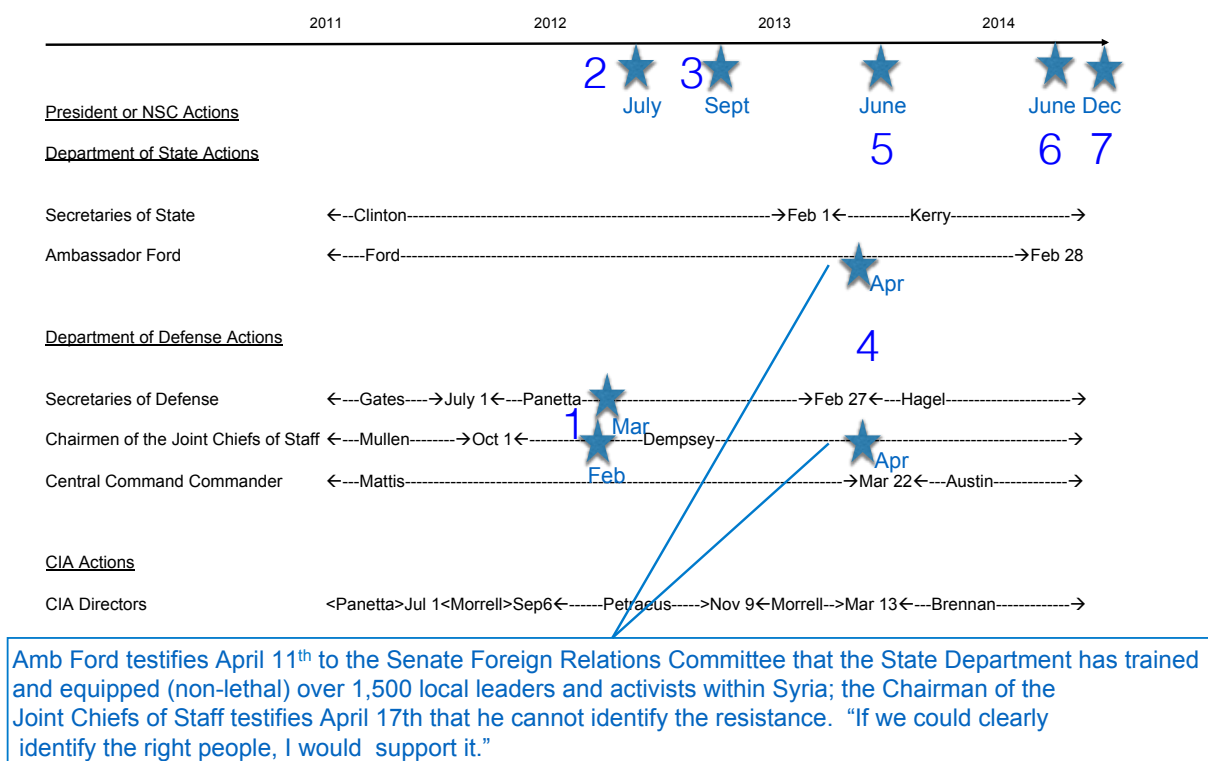


Figure 6: (Example of Process-Tracing Chart) Significant Divergence Apparent Between DoD Senior Leaders and the US Ambassador in Syria on Assessing the Resistance (April 2013)

³¹ Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, 113th Congress, 1st Session, April 17, 2013. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2013, accessed September 23, 2014, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys>.

This process-trace of the decision-making – of which the above chart is only a sample event -- is key to the analysis, findings, and conclusions of this dissertation research.

The Contribution of this Dissertation:

This dissertation makes one major and two secondary but important contributions. The major contribution of this dissertation is the provision of a detailed case study that demonstrates the role of organizational culture within the US military between the conventional military, including the kill/capture SOF elements, versus the unconventional forces (support to resistance elements) and ties this cleavage to policy outcomes in the early years of the Syrian rebellion. In other words, a case study in US interagency and military decision-making process that shows the marginalization of MSRA/UW expertise in the formulation of strategic options provided to the president.

The secondary but important contributions are to theory testing and towards bridging the gap from theory to policy development.

First, the conceptual framework for this dissertation is based on Niklas Luhmann's Systems Theory that addresses complexity and a system or organization's responses to such challenges. This dissertation tests and supports important elements of Luhmann's theory: autopoiesis, complexity, rationality, communications, and decisions. The case study of the US military's decision-making concerning the Syrian rebellion becomes a useful example of a system dealing with complexity by aggregating information and foreclosing options that do not fit with the autopoiesis nature of the organization.

Second, this dissertation contributes to the body of knowledge by beginning to illuminate the causal conditions between the structure, function, bureaucracy culture, assignment pattern of key military leaders, and the resulting uneven application of UW as a national security option. In so doing, this dissertation provides policy-relevant research for national security practitioners on the UW option.

Future research should examine this pattern of uneven application of UW in the post-9/11 period by researching other cases or attempting to discern other factors that may have affected these outcomes. Additionally, as more information concerning the early years of the Syrian rebellion becomes declassified, future researchers should reexamine this dissertation and challenge its assessments with the new information.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the research design for this dissertation. In the subsequent chapters I show that the US military structure and process for providing advice to the president and his national security decision-making team are flawed due to the marginalization of unconventional warfare (UW) expertise. This marginalization results in inadequate consideration to applying UW as a strategic option for the nation. This inadequate planning and decision-making during the Syrian rebellion in 2011-2014 is an act of negligence that the US cannot afford to repeat.

In the next chapter I examine the literature associated with this issue and its conceptual framework.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW³²

“President Kennedy came into office believing that American security would be challenged by guerilla forces against whom American power would have to be used in limited and quite special ways. He therefore began an effort to develop such a capability within the Army. That ran contrary to the Army’s definition of its essence, which involved ground combat by regular divisions, and by and large the Army was able to resist Kennedy’s effort.”³³

--Morton H. Halperin and Priscilla A. Clapp

This dissertation concerns the US military’s decision-making process and its inability to effectively generate strategic options for the national security decision-makers that involve support to resistance movements. Consequently, the literature review for this dissertation concerns national security decision-making -- not resistance movements and not revolutions. In this chapter I describe the literature concerning US national security decision-making in general, and specifically the US military decision-making process as it addresses support to resistance movements. In so doing, I highlight the gap in the literature that this dissertation addresses.

³² Portions of this chapter appeared in earlier papers submitted during coursework at the University of South Florida. Specifically, POS 6933 PhD Capstone in the Spring Semester of 2017 and POS 6707 Qualitative Methods in the Fall Semester 2016.

³³ Morton H. Halperin and Priscilla A. Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 33.

The analysis of the literature underscores the significant role of organizational culture and how that shapes the inputs from the various institutions; e.g., the State Department, the Intelligence Community, and the Defense Department. Furthermore, the literature shows organizational cultural cleavages between the various Services of the US military; i.e., the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. These are well known to even the casual observer of national security affairs.

However, there are two other important institutional and cultural cleavages that are not as well documented in the literature that manifest themselves in this research. First is the cleavage between the conventional military and the Special Operations Forces (SOF), which is somewhat known due to the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Second, and arguably more salient, is institutional and cultural cleavage within the Special Operations community: the cleavage between the units that specialize in kill/capture operations and those who specialize in unconventional warfare – support to resistance elements. It is this institutional and organizational cleavage between the conventional military, including the kill/capture SOF elements, versus the unconventional warfare organizations that have sparse literature coverage. *This is the arena of this dissertation and where the dissertation makes its contributions. This study uniquely demonstrates the role of organizational culture within the US military between the conventional military including the kill/capture SOF elements versus the unconventional forces (support to resistance elements) and ties this cleavage to policy outcomes in the early years of the Syrian rebellion.* Although the literature shows a few isolated sparks of brilliance concerning this line of thinking (Votel, Cleveland, Connett, and Irwin, 2016), these sparks have not yet caught fire within the conventional military

establishment nor within the national security enterprise. The conventional military seems to minimize such thinking and writing.

This chapter is organized into the following seven sections, and the unifying thread between all of them is the factor of organizational culture. From general to specific, the first six sections, starting with a review of the conceptual framework from Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, build a logic chain that demonstrates the critical role of organizational culture in US national security decision-making. The seventh section then culminates this chapter by showing how this dissertation contributes to this body of knowledge.

- The Base: The Conceptual Framework of Luhmann's Systems Theory
- The Big Picture: Foreign Policy and National Security Decision-Making
- Role of Organizational Culture within the National Security Decision-Making
- Organizational Culture and Cleavage within the US Military
- Organizational Culture and Cleavage within Special Operations
- Emerging Literature
- The Contribution of this Dissertation: Addressing the Gap

The Base: The Conceptual Framework of Luhmann's Systems Theory

As described more fully in the previous chapter, the core theoretical basis for this study is Niklas Luhmann's Systems Theory (Luhmann, 2002) that recognizes and addresses complexity and a system's or organization's tendency to reproduce or reinforce its own structure and activities rather than to more openly or holistically address the challenge of change. Luhmann suggests that when an organization has

established a mechanism to reduce uncertainty, other alternative options are likely to be discarded.

Luhmann's writings on complexity provide an interesting lens to view the Syria case. Luhmann argues that a system or organization "bundles" complex developments in the environment and then undertakes indifference or other arrangements to deal with this complexity. The system engages in a "reduction of complexity" by ignoring or treating the new developments with a template or design that it previously experienced under different conditions.³⁴ The system or organization has a "tendency to limit the problem to the question of the arrangements that a system has at its disposal."³⁵

Joseph Pilotta, Timothy Widman, and Susan Jasko further developed Luhmann's theory with a focus on organizational culture. (Pilotta, Widman, and Jasko, 2014) The authors argue "organizational culture serves the maintenance and development of organizations by providing important ordering mechanisms that further the organization's domination of complex information environments."³⁶ They argue that Luhmann reduces "complexity by simultaneously transmitting both a selected alternative from among multiple action possibilities and the motivation for the acceptance of that selection."³⁷ Of significance, they add, "Organizational culture consists primarily of

³⁴ Niklas Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, trans. Peter Gilgen (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 121.

³⁵ Ibid., 124.

³⁶ Joseph J. Pilotta, Timothy J. Widman, and Susan A. Jasko, "Meaning and Action in the Organizational Setting: An Interpretive Approach," in *An Introduction to Niklas Luhmann: Logic and Investigations*, ed. Joseph J. Pilotta and Wei-San Sun (New York: Hampton Press, 2014), 148.

³⁷ Ibid., 154.

open-ended context framed by significant symbols and modes of legitimated social action that enables selective responses to changes.”³⁸

Luhmann posits that systems or organizations will avoid or exclude developments that are deemed risky before they then rationally evaluate possible response options. In Luhmann’s words, there is “always a non-rational zone outside the marked space” for rational consideration.³⁹ This comment provides a strong segue for the following section on Alex Mintz’ theory of decision-making, which involves a two-stage process that immediately eliminates unfamiliar options from consideration.

The Big Picture: Foreign Policy and National Security Decision-Making

Alex Mintz’ theory of foreign policy decision-making readily appears to be built from the concepts of Luhmann’s systems theory, although much of their research was in parallel during the 1990s. Mintz sequentially integrates cognitive and rational theories concerning decision-making in a manner that Luhmann, Pilotta, Widman, and Jasko would recognize.⁴⁰ In this section, I first describe Mintz’ theory, then show how two other researchers added to the theory.

As Mintz describes it, there are two general schools of thought for foreign policy decision-making: rationale choice and cognitive psychology. Mintz integrates both of these approaches by stating that decision-makers actually use a two-stage process that first eliminates alternatives with unacceptable returns (the cognitive psychology approach) and then analyzes the remaining options with the clear risk-gain lens (rational

³⁸ Ibid., 155.

³⁹ Luhmann, 136.

⁴⁰ Alex Mintz, ed., *Integrating Cognitive and Rationale Theories of Foreign Policy Decision Making* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

decision-making). Mintz originally conceived of this cognitive psychology step with a “non-compensatory principle” whereby a national decision-maker would exclude certain options that brought unacceptable consequences, usually from a domestic political dimension.⁴¹ However, of significance, Mintz added that political decision-makers would also remove options that they considered to be “militarily unfeasible” which underscores the significance of the advice they would receive from the military, even prior to receiving a formal menu of options.⁴²

Steven B. Redd extended Mintz’ theory in two important respects. First, he highlighted the role of ambiguity and how familiar the decision-makers were with the set of options presented to them. To Redd, such familiarity or unfamiliarity would have a major impact in the cognitive psychology step that may result in the exclusion of options not due to domestic political reasons but to a more basic unfamiliarity with the option.⁴³ Second, within the framework of Mintz’ theory, Redd would become a strong proponent and advocate for the process-tracing method linking the decision-making process to the foreign policy outcomes.⁴⁴ In this dissertation, I use the process-trace method to show the linkage, too.

Vesna Danilovic reinforced and further developed Redd’s contribution that the cognitive psychology step would exclude certain options from the subsequent rational analysis phase. Danilovic specified the concepts of “prior beliefs” and “working scripts”

⁴¹ Ibid., 1-3.

⁴² Ibid., 6.

⁴³ Steven B. Redd, “The Poliheuristic Theory of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Experimental Evidence,” in *Integrating Cognitive and Rationale Theories in Foreign Policy Decision Making*, ed. Alex Mintz (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 116.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 106.

as significant factors that shaped the responses and preferences of decision-makers in the cognitive psychology stage.⁴⁵

Of significance, although Mintz cites examples of military options presented to national security decision-makers, he does not narrow this aperture to examine how his theory might apply to the internal decision-making process within the military.

Thus, Alex Mintz' theory of foreign policy decision-making, that integrates both cognitive and rational theories into a two-step process, provides a more specific lens to Luhmann's conceptual framework for this dissertation. The further refinements from Redd and Danilovic extend the understanding of the cognitive factors to include familiarity with the options, prior beliefs, and biases as cognitive – not rational – factors that preemptively exclude options before they can be rationally considered.

In addition to Mintz and his colleagues, several other key scholars critically analyzed the NSC structure and decision-making. The classic textbook for basic national security studies is Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor, Michael J. Meese, and Suzanne C. Nielsen's seminal work *American National Security*, originally published in 1981 with its sixth edition in 2009.⁴⁶ Editors Karl Inderfurth and Lock Johnson's text, *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council*, provide unique insights from numerous contributing researchers and practitioners into the NSC process and deliberations.⁴⁷ Christopher C. Shoemaker's, *Structure, Function and the NSC Staff* provides almost a staff officer's handbook to understanding the decision-making

⁴⁵ Vesna Danilovic, "The Rational-Cognitive Debate and Poliheuristic Theory," in *Integrating Cognitive and Rationale Theories in Foreign Policy Decision Making*, ed. Alex Mintz (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 131-132, 136.

⁴⁶ Amos A. Jordan. et al. *American National Security*, 208-229.

⁴⁷ Karl F. Inderfurth and Lock K. Johnson, eds., *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

process.⁴⁸ Finally, *Good Judgment in Foreign Policy: Theory and Application* from editors Stanley A. Renshon and Deborah Welch Larson provided an excellent overview of not only the decision-making process but to the analysis of what constitutes good judgment.⁴⁹

However, none of these well-known NSC and foreign policy decision-making texts fully explore the role of organizational culture in the decision-making. A more limited subset of this work is highlighted in the next section.

Role of Organizational Culture within the National Security Decision-Making

Whereas the literature concerning national security decision-making described above focuses primarily on the various processes and organizations, it is apparent that individual organizations and bureaucracies have their own cultures that do impact on policy developments.⁵⁰ This analysis is a key basis to this dissertation.

Morton Halperin and Priscilla A. Clapp's *Bureaucracy Politics and Foreign Policy* provides an excellent analysis on the bureaucracies' roles in foreign policy decision-making.⁵¹ This important work clearly described the entrenched bureaucracies and how they approach initiatives or events that are neither anticipated nor part of the traditional core functions of that agency. For the military, brought up with the understanding that

⁴⁸ Christopher C. Shoemaker, *Structure, Function and the NSC Staff: An Officer's Guide to the National Security Council* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1989).

⁴⁹ Stanley A. Renshon and Deborah Welch Larson, eds., *Good Judgment in Foreign Policy* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003).

⁵⁰ This section was extracted from a previous paper I submitted as part of my studies at the University of South Florida for POS 6045, November 29, 2015

⁵¹ Morton H. Halperin and Priscilla A. Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006).

they fight the nation's wars with a deeply ingrained tradition of conventional war, any significant deviation from this line of thinking is treated with suspicion and deflection.⁵² This finding is somewhat reinforced in Amos A. Jordan's, et al, *American National Security*, but not with the same clarity.⁵³ More significantly, and germane to this post-9/11 era, is a similar finding by Janine Davidson, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans. She is quoted in the opening citation in the Introduction section of this dissertation, that the conventional military frequently failed to deliver creative national security options that the president was seeking.⁵⁴

Other authors more specifically highlight the fissures and frictions within various departments, agencies, and other elements that collectively make up the national security apparatus. This includes Roger Z. George and Harvey Rishikof's, *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating the Labyrinth*, which is organized to highlight the competing cultures within the agencies, departments, and other elements including the press and the courts.⁵⁵

This section on bureaucracy and organizational culture has a direct bearing on the earlier section concerning national security decision-making, and in particular, Alex Mintz' theory of the two-step heuristic approach to decision-making. Coupling these two together, the reader could anticipate the US military bureaucracy opposing initiatives that are outside of the core function of conventional war. In Mintz' theory, military

⁵² Morton H. Halperin and Priscilla A. Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 25-61.

⁵³ Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor, Jr., Michael J. Meese, and Suzanne C. Nielsen, *American National Security*, 6th ed. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 170-189.

⁵⁴ Janine Davidson, "The Contemporary Presidency", 129.

⁵⁵ Roger Z. George and Harvey Rishikof, *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating the Labyrinth* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

national security practitioners would likely eliminate such alternatives from even being considered during the development of strategic options in response to a crisis like the Syrian rebellion.

In summary, the literature clearly records the role of institutional and organizational culture of the various US government departments and agencies impacting national security decision-making. However, do similar cleavages exist within those organizations, specifically the US military?

Organizational Culture and Cleavage within the US Military

The topic of organizational culture cleavage within the US military is well known to national security studies scholars. The various institutional and organizational cultures between the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines – which manifests itself into distinct uniforms, most military schools, promotion systems, and most assignments -- contributed to shortcomings in US military operations in Vietnam, Grenada, and the Iranian hostage rescue attempt in 1980. This crescendo of military shortfalls from the 1960s through the early 1980s prompted Congress to enact the Goldwater-Nichols legislation that placed strong emphasis on “joint duty” (that is, duty at a headquarters that requires officers from more than one Service), even going so far as to tie officer promotions to the admiral and general ranks to mandatory prior service in these joint units. However, cultural changes occur over many years, arguably a generation, and are seldom resolved with an individual law.

Yet there is second cross cutting element of cleavage within the US military separate from the distinctions of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, which is the

cleavage between conventional military forces and Special Operations Forces (SOF). Each of the Services (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) has select units that are designated as SOF – these include Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs (an acronym meaning sea, air, and land; referring to their infiltration mediums), and Air Force special aircraft and flight crews. Together, these select sub-elements from the Services constitute SOF. There is an unmistakable cultural cleavage between those that are recruited, trained, educated, and employed to conduct conventional combat and these forces that are assessed and selected from the conventional forces' junior ranks and subsequently trained, educated, and employed to conduct special operations. That said, today there is strong leadership attention within the Services and within SOF to integrate these forces within their Services, as the needs of warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq made clear to all commanders, but, as stated earlier, changing organizational cultures can take many years.

There is a good amount of literature that documents this difference between the conventional military and SOF. Perhaps the best that highlights the cultural aspects as it relates to the function of risk-taking during the decision-making process is Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger in his 1998 study of five cases of foreign military intervention decisions. In his text, somewhat based on Alex Mintz' two-stage decision-making theory covered earlier in this chapter, Vertzberger showed how military officers – by culture and organizations – would overstate or minimize risk depending on their backgrounds. Of note, however, Vertzberger addressed several variables in his sets, including context, culture, the individual, and the group, which consequently did not fully examine the organizational culture variable in sufficient light. Moreover, his one hundred pages

addressed five different case studies. The focus of this one variable set in this one case study on the Syrian resistance in this dissertation provides a more in depth examination of this causal relationship.

A second significant text addressing this cultural cleavage between conventional and SOF cultures is found in the research and writings of Colin Gray, a theorist of strategic studies who has written extensively on nuclear strategy, arms control, maritime strategy, and geopolitics. His 1996 work on strategy highlighted this organizational and cultural cleavage between the conventional military and SOF officers. However, given the time period of his research and writing on this important topic, he focused on neither the post-9/11 environment nor the recent developments that highlighted the opportunities to support resistance movements as a national security option, which this dissertation does address.

A third and more contemporary text on this cleavage comes from Dr. Hy Rothstein who published a detailed case study of unconventional warfare during the Afghanistan war in 2006. In this work he documents the distinct cultural divide between conventional and unconventional warfare forces, and consequently, how UW options have become marginalized.⁵⁶ However, his analysis led to more far-reaching recommendations than this dissertation will present. The linkage of causality to recommendations is important.

Yet the organizational culture and cleavage within the US military is only part of the explanation. Within SOF itself, there is a significant cleavage.

⁵⁶ Hy S. Rothstein, *Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006).

Organizational Culture and Cleavage within Special Operations

To most outside observers, SOF is a small and elite element within the military that probably has its own homogenous culture. Although that is true to an extent, there is actually a significant organizational and cultural cleavage that divides the special operators. Retired Army Lieutenant General Charles Cleveland, a career Special Forces officer who commanded the Army Special Operations Command from 2012 to 2015, wrote extensively about this dichotomy in SOF in the command's professional journal, *Special Warfare*. Although SOF is assigned several mission sets by law, including unconventional warfare, direct action (kill/capture missions), foreign internal defense (advice and assistance to foreign governments fighting insurgencies), and special reconnaissance, General Cleveland binned the various missions into two components that he called Surgical Strike (the direct action, counterterrorism, and counter-proliferation mission sets) and Special Warfare (unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, civil affairs, and psychological operations). Within these two arms of SOF, the surgical strike mission set requires a high degree of intelligence to "squeeze out uncertainty" before striking, while the special warfare mission set requires the operator to "wade into uncertainty" and still prevail. The skill sets, as well as the psychological backgrounds of the operators themselves, likewise present a dichotomy along these same lines. So it is not surprising to find different organizational cultures, and indeed rivalries, between the two communities within SOF.

A review of the literature finds other authors confirming this same finding. Linda Robinson, a RAND researcher and independent author, has written extensively about SOF in the post-9/11 era and published several insightful works that address the gap in

understanding and properly utilizing unconventional warfare and the broader category of Special Warfare.⁵⁷ As her focus on the unconventional warfare mission set shows, there is a remarkable difference between the kill/capture units of SOF (e.g., Army Rangers, Navy SEALs) and those in Army Special Forces who are assigned the primary role of support to resistance forces.

David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb in their 2007 work, *United States Special Operations Forces*, described SOF missions, organizations, and seminal operations, but more significantly highlight the neglect that senior defense and even SOF leaders have displayed in not pursuing strategic unconventional warfare options for the nation. The authors, Tucker an associate professor on terrorism and irregular warfare at the Naval Postgraduate School and Lamb a senior fellow at the National Defense University and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Resources and Plans, provide a persuasive argument for SOF leaders to provide independent strategic options for the nation that would include unconventional warfare options to support resistance elements.⁵⁸

With ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, it is important to review not just the decision-making literature of the past few decades, but to also see and understand the emerging literature that is not fully absorbed into the body of knowledge.

⁵⁷ For example see Dan Madden, Dick Hoffmann, Michael Johnson, Fred Krawchuk, John E. Peters, Linda Robinson and Abby Doll. *Special Warfare: The Missing Middle in U.S. Coercive Options* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014). http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR828.html.

⁵⁸ David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Emerging Literature

Certainly, how SOF addressed the Syrian conflict in the 2015-2018 period, where it did partner with local forces and advised, assisted, armed, and shaped their activities to fight ISIS, stands in marked contrast to the military's reluctance to employ SOF with the resistance in the 2011-2014 period, the time frame of this dissertation. Today, there are several articles emerging that address these activities – and the wider implications for unconventional warfare beyond Syria. Two such works bear mention for this dissertation.

First, General Joseph Votel, the former commanding general of the US Special Operations Command and current commanding general of the US Central Command, co-authored a 2016 article entitled “Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone”⁵⁹ which advocated for a stronger application of UW as part of a larger “political warfare” strategy that was proposed by the scholar Max Boot in 2013.⁶⁰ General Votel and his co-authors reviewed not historical operations with resistance elements in this “gray zone” between open war and diplomacy, but advocated a holistic approach within the national security enterprise to employing such means as unconventional warfare, psychological operations, covert actions, and other elements in conjunction with but beyond classic diplomacy. Votel highlighted that the US seems to have lost much of its Cold War era skills for operating in these gray zones with non-conventional means.

⁵⁹ Joseph L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin, “Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 1st Quarter 2016, 101-109.

⁶⁰ Max Boot, “Political Warfare”, *Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Innovations Memorandum No. 33*, June 7, 2013.

The most directly applicable literature vis-à-vis this dissertation comes from Will Irwin (who was also a co-author of the Votel article described above) who authored a paper entitled “A Comprehensive and Proactive Approach to Unconventional Warfare” that was based on the post-2014 period and the controversial Syria Train and Equip Program.⁶¹ Of note, the Syria Train and Equip program was not UW; it was a classic training mission to train and equip a force to conduct counterterrorist operations against, in this case, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In fact, the Train and Equip mission forbid any activities to unseat the Assad regime. That said, Irwin correctly identified the root problem with the Train and Equip program in that it was initiated too late and should have been framed and focused on UW. Moreover, Irwin strongly argues for the need to make contact with resistance elements early to enable the US to properly assess the feasibility and utility of working with such elements. In sum, this short fifteen-page article is the most applicable item in the vast body of literature that touches upon the research question of this dissertation.

Contribution of this Dissertation: Addressing the Gap

There are one major and four minor conceptual contributions of this dissertation to the body of knowledge and literature involving the interagency and military decision-making processes concerning support to resistance elements.

The major contribution of this dissertation is the provision of a detailed case study that demonstrates the role of organizational culture within the US military between the conventional military, including the kill/capture SOF elements, versus the

⁶¹ Will Irwin, *A Comprehensive and Proactive Approach to Unconventional Warfare* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, May 2016).

unconventional forces (support to resistance elements) and ties this cleavage to policy outcomes in the early years of the Syrian rebellion. In other words, a case study in US interagency and military decision-making process that shows the marginalization of MSRA/UW expertise in the formulation of strategic options provided to the president.

The four minor conceptual contributions follow. First, this dissertation provides a case of theory testing for Niklas Luhmann's Systems Theory, specifically the tendency of an organization to discard options dealing with complexity when those options are not part of the organization's normal procedures and processes. Second, in a similar vein, this dissertation provides a case study directly testing and supporting Alex Mintz' two-stage theory for foreign policy decision-making. Third, this dissertation also provides a clear case for Mary Kaldor's *New War Theory*, and specifically the element of that theory which argues the conventional military does not fully comprehend the irregular warfare activities that we are currently engaged in, and how a conventional military approach to these types of violent political struggles has limited utility and applicability. Fourth, this dissertation reinforces the rich literature on institutional and organizational culture theory.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described the literature concerning US national security decision-making in general, and specifically the US military decision-making process as it addresses support to resistance movements. The analysis of the literature highlights the significant role of organizational culture and how that shapes the inputs from the various departments and agencies of the US government; e.g. the State Department,

the Intelligence Community, and the Defense Department. Furthermore, the literature also shows organizational cleavages between the various military services within the US military. These are well documented in the literature. However, there is also a cleavage between the conventional military forces and the Special Operations Forces, and within the Special Operations Forces there is also an organizational cultural cleavage between those who specialize in kill/capture missions and those who specialize in UW. It is this institutional cleavage – and resulting cultural cleavage – that has sparse literature coverage. This is the arena of this dissertation, and this is where the dissertation's contribution is found. This study uniquely demonstrates the role of organizational culture within the US military between the conventional military including the kill/capture SOF elements versus the unconventional forces (support to resistance elements) and ties this cleavage to policy outcomes in the early years of the Syrian rebellion.

Given this background of the literature review, in three of the next four chapters, I sequentially examine each of the three supporting questions:

- Was there a viable and acceptable resistance force for the US to partner?
- If so, how did the US military miss this opportunity?
- What are the implications?

CHAPTER THREE:

WAS THERE A VIABLE AND ACCEPTABLE RESISTANCE FORCE IN SYRIA DURING THE PERIOD MARCH 2011 TO JUNE 2014?

“The common refrain among people skeptical of deeper involvement in Syria is that...America and its allies no longer know who the opposition really is. Ford refuted that notion head on. ‘We’ve identified them quite well now.... We’ve worked with them for years. They need to get the tools they must have to change the balance on the ground.’”

--Former US Ambassador to Syria Robert S. Ford in an interview with Christiane Amanpour ⁶²



Source:

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/cia-helping-arms-shipments-to-syria-rebels-through-turkey-report.aspx?pageID=238&nid=43580>, accessed March 24, 2018.

Figure 7: Syrian Youth and Rebels in Aleppo March 22, 2013.

⁶² Krever, Mick, *Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford: I could no longer ‘defend the American policy’*, CNN, accessed at December 31, 2015, [www.http://amanpour.blogs.cnn.com/2014/06/03/former-u-s-ambassador-to-syria-i-could-no-longer-defend-the-american-policy-robert-ford/](http://amanpour.blogs.cnn.com/2014/06/03/former-u-s-ambassador-to-syria-i-could-no-longer-defend-the-american-policy-robert-ford/).

While the previous two chapters set the stage for the dissertation by detailing the research design, methodology, data collection strategy, and literature review, this chapter begins the analytical portion that provides the logic-chain that links the first, second, and third key questions to the original research question, the hypothesis, and ultimately to the findings. This chapter addresses the first of those three key questions: Was there a viable and acceptable resistance force in Syria during the period March 2011 to June 2014?

To answer the overall research question of why the US failed to provide military support to the Syrian resistance from 2011-2014, one must first establish that there indeed was a viable and acceptable resistance force in Syria and that it was recognizable during this period. The purpose of this chapter is to present that argument, using data and information openly available during this period, with no benefit of subsequent data.

The steps to unfold this argument – the major sections of this chapter – are listed below.⁶³

- Framing the Analysis

- The Time Period

- Documenting the Resistance: A Note on Sources and Methods

⁶³ Some of the text of this chapter was from a research paper “The Syrian Resistance 2011-2014” that I submitted at the University of South Florida for course CPO 5935 (Comparative Politics in the Middle East) on November 24, 2016. Portions of this text also appeared in an unpublished paper that I emailed to my dissertation chair, Dr. Mohsen Milani, on November 6, 2016. Portions of this chapter also appeared in the author’s section of Paul S. Lieber, Richard Rubright, Tom Searle, Seth Leuthner, Will Irwin, and Konrad Trautman, *Syria Train and Equip: an Academic Study* (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: JSOU Press, 2016).

--Temporal Roots of the Rebellion: The Pre-Arab Spring Years

Show the Political, Economic, Historical, and Social Underpinnings to the Rebellion

--Spatial Roots of the Rebellion: The Arab Spring Provides the

Regional Context and Spark

- The Viable and Acceptable Resistance

--Defining the Viable and Acceptable Resistance

-- Evolution of Two Sequential and Overlapping Organizations

--Time Period 1: The Bottom-Up, Grassroots Rebellion (Summer of 2011 through December 2012) (See Figure 8 below for a graphic depiction of these four time periods.)

--Time Period 2: The Sunni Extremists Rise and Eventually Dominate the Anti-Assad Fight (September 2012 through June 2014 and later)

--Time Period 3: The Emergence of Political and Military Leadership in Exile (December 2012 through June 2014 and later)

--Time Period 4: Iranian Quds Force, Lebanese Hizballah, and other Iranian Surrogates Shift the Balance of Forces (February 2013 through June 2014 and later)

- The Counterargument: “Yes, the resistance did exist, but it was too fractured to be useful.” The Rebuttal: “Advise and Assist.”
- Synthesis: The Missed Windows of Opportunity



Figure 8: Four Time Periods in Analyzing the Resistance

8

Framing the Analysis

The Time Period

As a reminder, this dissertation is scoped to the time period of March 2011 to June 2014, which corresponds to the outbreak of violence in Deraa and concludes when the US administration finally decided to provide military support to the resistance when Mosul fell to ISIS.

This time period is significant because the grassroots resistance movement at that time emerged from Sunni cities and towns throughout Syria. Moreover, the resistance was politically moderate, non-Salafist, and trending

towards gaining strength against the Assad regime. As this resistance movement was gaining capability, paradoxically, it was essentially ignored and received little support from the United States. Over time many of its fighters and new recruits then shifted their allegiance to the rising extremist organizations, like al Qaeda's al Nusra Front and ISIS, both organizations being better armed and supported from outside powers. The 2014 end point for this analysis is important: in June 2014 Mosul fell to ISIS and the nature of this internal Syrian rebellion became trans-regional with ISIS becoming the major anti-regime armed element. The period from the summer of 2011 to the summer of 2013 was, however, a missed opportunity when the United States could have supported a moderate, local, resistance element that may have successfully challenged the Assad regime while denying recruits to the then-fledgling Islamic State. This will be explained in detail throughout this chapter.

Documenting the Resistance: A Note on Sources and Methods

To present the argument that a moderate resistance force did exist in Syria during this March 2011 to June 2014 period – and that US intelligence and military officials should have seen and recognized it – it is important to show the existence of this force using information and data that was openly available during that period, with no benefit of hindsight or subsequent information.

Given the significantly different security environment then, as opposed to 2018, it is not surprising that there was a rather extensive network of media reporters, academics, and activists operating in the Syrian cities, towns, and

countryside. Moreover, resistance leaders were active on social media, including Skype, Facebook, and Twitter. All of this allowed unique insights and access into Syria – albeit not the classic or traditional intelligence collection sources and methods to which the US military was accustomed.

One of the leading sources of information was the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in May 2006 for the purpose of documenting and reporting the human rights conditions inside of Syria, even several years before the rebellion began.⁶⁴ The SOHR was founded by Rami Abdulrahman (also known as Ossama Suleiman), himself a Syrian refugee, who fled to the United Kingdom in 2000 after spending three terms in Syrian prisons as a pro-democracy activist.⁶⁵

Once the rebellion broke out, the SOHR shifted its focus to documenting the fighting. In December 2011, in an interview with *Reuters*, Rami Abdulrahman claimed to have expanded his source network from fifty-four, when the uprising began, to over two hundred.⁶⁶ The SOHR posted these direct source reports onto its website that provided a running-analysis of the fighting.⁶⁷

Media reporters from across Europe, the Middle East, and the United States, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *al Jazeera*,

⁶⁴ *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights* website, accessed February 22, 2017, www.syriahr.com.

⁶⁵ *Coventry – an Unlikely Home to a Prominent Syria Activist*, Reuters, accessed December 8, 2011, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-syria-idUKTRE7B71XG20111208>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ In an interview with US Ambassador to Syria Robert S. Ford, on March 30, 2017, the ambassador assessed that the SOHR was reliable up through the 2012 period, but was accused of being politicized in the following years.

descended upon Syria. One of the most famous was *Washington Post's* Anthony Shadid, who won two Pulitzer Prizes for his coverage of the Iraq war, but who died in Syria while covering the rebellion in February 2012.⁶⁸

Dr. Joshua Landis, then an assistant professor at the University of Oklahoma who later became its Director of the Center for Middle East Studies, wrote a detailed expose of the Syrian opposition in 2006-2007. He served previously as a senior Fulbright researcher in Damascus in 2005, living a total of four years in Syria until the rebellion began. He went on to established *Syria Comment*, a daily web-based newsletter on Syrian politics using his extensive contacts in Syria. He published articles from these sources and provided his analysis as the rebellion unfolded.⁶⁹

Another such organization, *Syria Direct*, emerged as a non-profit journalism organization that produced timely coverage of Syria while training Syrian and American journalists in professional newsgathering techniques. Although founded late in this time period in 2013, the organization made important contributions in tracking the rebellion.⁷⁰

Indicative of the relatively open border during this time period, in May 2013 Senator John McCain walked across the border into Syria and met with moderate resistance leaders of the Free Syrian Army.

⁶⁸ Paul Farhi and Mary Beth Sheridan, "Correspondent Anthony Shadid, 43, Dies in Syria," *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2012, accessed February 22, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/correspondent-anthony-shadid-43-dies-in-syria/2012/02/16/gIQAo2NyIR_story.html?utm_term=.b21cc5212ea0.

⁶⁹ College of International Studies, Department of International and Area Studies, University of Oklahoma, accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.ou.edu/content/cis/ias/faculty/joshua-landis.html>.

⁷⁰ See <http://syriadirect.org/pages/about-us/>

It is one thing to gather, collect, and report such information as a media reporter or activist would normally do, but it is quite another task to digest that information and produce an analysis that is useful for decision-makers. A key private organization that accomplished that task was the *Institute for the Study of War (ISW)*.⁷¹ A non-partisan, non-profit, public policy research organization, ISW produced six major studies during this period: *The Struggle for Syria 2011* (December 2011), *Syria's Armed Opposition* (March 2012), *Syria's Political Opposition* (April 2012), *Syria's Maturing Insurgency* (June 2012), *Jihad in Syria* (September 2012), and *The Free Syrian Army* (March 2013). Together these documents provide 248 pages of high quality analysis of the Syrian resistance. Later in this chapter I introduce examples that provide a graphical display of not only the resistance units and leaders active during this period, but also the evolution and growth of their units.

Of special note, the ISW analysts did not just harvest reporting coming from the SOHR, the media, and others on the ground in Syria; they also established direct contact with many moderate resistance leaders via Skype, email, and telephone. Utilizing fluent Arab-speaking analysts at ISW, the Institute established contact, rapport, and communication with resistance leaders.⁷²

⁷¹ In an interview with the US Ambassador to Syria, Robert S. Ford, on March 30, 2017, the ambassador gave high marks to the reporting and analysis coming from the *Institute for the Study of War* on Syria during this period.

⁷² See the methodology sections in the above mentioned six studies, which can be found at the Institute for the Study of War's website, www.understandingwar.org.

Another private research organization or think tank actively studying and publishing on the Syrian resistance during this period was the *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (WINEP). In September of 2012 WINEP produced a thoroughly researched study on the Syrian resistance, similar and consistent with ISW's research, that documented the various fighting elements and showed their political and military evolution throughout the rebellion. One of the lead authors of this study was Andrew Tabler, the co-founder and former editor-in-chief of *Syria Today*, Syria's first private-sector English language magazine. Tabler resided in the Middle East for fourteen years and achieved widespread access throughout Syria before the rebellion.⁷³

There is one additional source and method that bears special mention. Near the beginning of the rebellion, *Pechter Polls*, which conducted opinion surveys in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, directed a poll of Syrian opposition leaders and elements in December 2011.⁷⁴ *Pechter Polls* administered a follow-up survey in June and July 2012 under contract for the International Republican Institute (IRI).⁷⁵

The 2011 survey used the snowball polling technique with five starting points that polled over 186 opposition activists inside Syria. The results showed

⁷³ Jeffrey White, Andrew J. Tabler, and Aaron Zelin, *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013).

⁷⁴ Pollock, David, "What Does the Syrian Opposition Believe?," *Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2012 accessed February 24, 2017, <http://washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/what-does-the-syrian-opposition-believe>.

⁷⁵ See <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2012%20August%2017%20Survey%20of%20Syrian%20Opposition,%20June%201-July%202,%202012.pdf>.

the opposition activists with a moderate political vision looking to Turkey as their governmental model. This survey also showed only a small fraction of activists that strongly favored sharia law, clerical influence in government, or a heavy emphasis on Islamic education.⁷⁶ The survey concluded that the “core of the Syrian opposition inside the country is not made up of the Muslim Brotherhood or other fundamentalist forces, and certainly not of al Qaeda or other jihadi organizations.”⁷⁷

The subsequent polling in 2012 confirmed and expanded the findings of the earlier study. The activist respondents now expanded to 1,168. The survey showed strong preferences for elections, a new constitution, a strong judiciary, and a need for a revitalized economy. The respondents identified the Free Syrian Army and Syrian National Council as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people.⁷⁸

I do acknowledge that these are low polling samples and the inherent limitations of the snowball polling technique; i.e., its non-random nature and propensity to oversample, albeit in small numbers. Nonetheless, this is additional information pointing to the viable and acceptable nature of the Syrian resistance during this period.

⁷⁶ Pollock, David, “What Does the Syrian Opposition Believe?”, *Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2012, accessed February 24, 2017, <http://washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/what-does-the-syrian-opposition-believe>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ See <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2012%20August%2017%20Survey%20of%20Syrian%20Opposition,%20June%201-July%202,%202012.pdf>.

All of this information was openly available to military, intelligence, and other national security practitioners during this period; however, none of this information was collected or reported by conventional intelligence means. The above sources and methods documented a clear resistance inside Syria, a topic examined in the next section.

Finally, there was a significant source of information and analysis that was inherent within the US government whose reporting was credible and readily available to US senior military and defense leaders: the US Ambassador to Syria, Robert S. Ford. Ambassador Ford served in Damascus from the very beginning of the rebellion until the embassy was forced to close in February 2012. He then returned to Washington to lead the State Department's Syria team for two years; thus, he served during the entire time of this dissertation's frame. Previously, he served five tours in Baghdad as the senior political advisor and later the deputy chief of mission. In those assignments he served under Ambassadors John Negroponte, Zalmay Khalilzad, Ryan Crocker, and Chris Hill.⁷⁹ He frequently visited various locales during the rebellion to meet with rebel leaders, civilians caught in the unfolding humanitarian disaster, and Syrian government officials. His insights and assessments were vital to those responsible for navigating US policy through these challenging shoals. His writings and official Congressional testimonies figure prominently in this dissertation.

⁷⁹ Robert S. Ford, *Testimony: US Strategy to Defeat ISIS*, (Washington, DC: The Middle East Institute, September 24, 2014), accessed December 31, 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/testimony-us-strategy-defeat-isis>.

Temporal Roots of the Rebellion: Pre-Arab Spring Years Show the Political, Economic, Historical, and Social Underpinnings to the Rebellion

There is perhaps a tendency to believe that the Arab Spring in general and the Syrian rebellion in particular simply sparked with the confluence of conditions unique to 2011 – like a chemical reaction. That is a very incomplete and misleading judgment. Indeed, the seeds of rebellion were sewn well before 2011. To be sure, the sprouts in Syria were weak and nascent, but they nonetheless existed and oppression nurtured them to blossom into rebellion by 2011.

In 2010, a year before the Arab Spring uprising began in Tunisia, Dr. Walid Phares published *The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East*. In this prescient work, Dr. Phares predicted the upcoming uprisings and provided a constructivist description of the various social, economic, and political underpinnings of the upcoming upheavals that had been percolating over the previous decades. Although he described the historical roots of the inevitable revolutions in the Maghreb, Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, his descriptions of Syria are illuminating for this study. Phares described the political oppression beginning in the early 1960s under the Hafez Assad regime that culminated with the 1982 uprising in Hama that left more than 18,000 dead.⁸⁰ With Hafez Assad's death in June 2000, the control of the regime passed to his

⁸⁰ Walid Phares, *The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2010), 203-210.

son Bashar Assad and his five security services, all involved in financial, business, and corrupting influences in Syria and Lebanon.”⁸¹

Although the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff would complain in 2012 that no one could identify moderate resistance leaders to him, Phares identified resistance leaders as early as 2010. Resistance leaders like Ammar Abdelhamid, Michel Kilo, Riad Seif, Farid Ghadri, Abdel Halim Khaddam, and political organizations like the National Council for the Damascus Declaration, the Social Peace Movement Party, Syrian Reform Party, all of which would form the cadre and nucleus of much of the initial resistance activities by 2012. Well before that, however, in 2006 three hundred Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals signed the Beirut-Damascus Declaration calling for functional democracies in both countries.⁸² Phares prophetically wrote in 2010: “When (the Syrian masses mobilize for change)...democracies around the world must stand by Syria’s civil society, all the way to a democratic revolution. No doubt about it — it is coming.”⁸³

Walid Phares was not the only scholar to document the existence of the roots of the resistance well before the uprising. In 2006-2007 Dr. Joshua Landis published a detailed scholarly article in *The Washington Quarterly* describing the Syrian opposition.⁸⁴ In his article, co-authored with Joe Pace, another researcher who spent ten months in Syria, Landis described in detail the Syrian

⁸¹ Phares, 211.

⁸² Phares, 212-217.

⁸³ Phares, 220.

⁸⁴ Joshua Landis and Joe Pace, “The Syrian Opposition”, *The Washington Quarterly*, 30:1, Winter 2006-2007, 45.

regime opposition elements, including their contacts with the US embassy, beginning in 2000.

The political opposition to the Assad regime began to surface in January 2001 when over one thousand political activists signed a manifesto demanding comprehensive political reform in Syria. This Damascus Spring document was followed with a swift regime crackdown.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, the embryos of resistance movements – human rights groups, civil society forums, political parties, and Islamist organizations like the Moslem Brotherhood – began to form. Twelve human rights organizations and centers plus other organizations like the Free Political Prisoners Committee formed and became part of the opposition.⁸⁶ Civil society forums like the Committee for the Revival of Civil Society and the Jamal al-Atassi Forum for Democratic Dialogue also organized.⁸⁷ Kurdish political parties, although confined to the north, were indicative of the broad albeit not deep opposition efforts. Collectively, popular protests, civil society gatherings, dissident presence in the media increased from 2002 through 2005.⁸⁸

The Syrian regime's collusion in assassinating the Lebanese political leader Rafik Hariri on February 14, 2005 stimulated further movement within the opposition ranks, particularly towards unifying efforts for a broader-based resistance. The formation of the National Coordination Committee for the Defense of Basic Freedoms and Human Rights and a separate initiative from

⁸⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 50.

another civil society group to open dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood are two examples.⁸⁹

On October 18, 2006 a diverse group of five opposition elements issued the Damascus Declaration that called for democratic change based on nonviolence and opposition unity. Within hours, dozens of other groups pledged their support. Landis evaluated this development: “For the first time in Syrian history, an assemblage of bickering parties and scattered intellectuals representing Kurdish nationalists, Arab nationalists, Socialists, Communists, liberals, and Islamists united under a single platform for democratic change.”⁹⁰

Two months later, former Vice President Khaddam defected and joined the Muslim Brotherhood, exiling himself to Paris and eventually forming a new opposition coalition known as the National Salvation Front.⁹¹

In the few short years from the Damascus Spring of 2001, through the formation of a multi-group coalition advocating for democratic change in 2005, and to a high level defection from the regime in 2006, the seeds of Syrian rebellion were indeed germinating.

Phares’ and Landis’ works provide stunning detail to the Syrian opposition inside of Syria years before the rebellion began. Had these works been stamped “Secret” and appeared in official military and intelligence channels, military leaders would likely have read them. But because they were found in scholarly

⁸⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 55.

⁹¹ Ibid., 58.

journals and bookstores, perhaps most senior military and intelligence leaders never saw them.

Spatial Roots of the Rebellion: The Arab Spring Provides the Regional Context and Spark

In addition to placing the Syrian uprising in its historical context of oppression and resistance beginning in the 1960s, one must also place the Syrian uprising within the context of the regional Arab Spring uprisings that began December 17, 2010 when “Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of a local municipal office after being harassed by police officers in the central Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid.”⁹² Given the underlying political, social, and economic grievances against the many corrupt and repressive regimes throughout the region, this spark ignited the uprisings of the Arab Spring.



Source:

<https://arabspringanditscontexts.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/arabspring-map-black-and-white.jpg> accessed March 11, 2017

Figure 9: Map of the Middle East and North Africa

⁹² James Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10.

These revolts spread rapidly to Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, with protests of various intensities in Algeria, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, and the Gulf States.⁹³ (See Figure 9) From December 2010 to June 2013 approximately 90,000 people in 16 countries would die, but only the leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen would fall.⁹⁴ As Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds argued in their 2015 study, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*, the variation in the outcomes seemed to be shaped by structural factors of relative strength of the state and the degree of pluralism within the pro-democratic forces.⁹⁵

Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds extended their argument with "...the best hope for breaking down authoritarianism was peeling off the top military commanders from the autocrat"⁹⁶ and foreign intervention (read: foreign advisors as in the Libya case) plus the development of democratic institutions were also critical factors in their final analysis.⁹⁷

In contrast to Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds' text, Steven Cook, in his 2017 work, challenged the idea of a new dawn emerging from the Arab Spring by arguing three factors conspired to preclude such a development: "the non-revolutionary nature of the uprisings, the way leaders have leveraged institutions and their stickiness, and the search for identity among many in the region."⁹⁸

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 10, 11.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 219.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 221-224.

⁹⁸ Steven A. Cook, *False Dawn: Protest, Democracy, and Violence in the New Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 241.

Cook's thoroughly descriptive yet deeply pessimistic analysis seems to conclude with a prescription to do little but watch. Moreover, his thesis suggests that short of a revolution, with the horrendous violence normally inherent in such endeavors, no democratic changes will emerge from the Arab Middle East. Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds seem more measured in their analysis with their prescription to develop democratic institutions, separate the security and military institutions from the autocrat, and provide foreign support and assistance for political reforms short of revolution. Indeed, most violent political struggles are less catastrophic than full-scale revolutions.

The Viable and Acceptable Resistance:

Defining The Viable and Acceptable Syrian Resistance

This phrase "viable and acceptable resistance" holds a prominent role throughout this dissertation. Although I defined this term in the research design chapter, it bears some revisit here.

The word viable means feasible or capable of working successfully; in this case, capable of successfully executing unconventional warfare. As cited in Chapter One, unconventional warfare is defined as activities to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area. So, in the Syrian context, viable refers to having that capability to disrupt, coerce, or overthrow the Assad regime. Keeping in mind that the words "disrupt, coerce, or overthrow" are on a spectrum, a resistance force that is not yet able to overthrow the

Assad regime, but one that can still disrupt it, is also, by definition, a viable resistance force. Moreover, once US support, like weapons, ammunition, and training, is effectively provided to such a resistance force, one would expect to see the capabilities of the resistance force expand from simple disruption to coercion and then overthrow.

The word acceptable means suitable or allowed. Given the topic of this dissertation, I focus specifically on acceptable to the United States. In this case, I argue, an “acceptable” resistance force would need to meet three criteria. First, the interests and objectives of the resistance force must align with interests and objectives of the US. This does not necessarily mean that the resistance force likes or supports the US, only that the interests and objectives align. So, to the extent that the US sought the removal of the Assad regime and the resistance force did as well, then this first criteria is met regardless of whether the rebels were pro-US or not. Second, the political end state of the resistance could not contradict US values; i.e., the resistance force could not be striving to establish a dictatorship while receiving US support. Third, the resistance force could not use terrorist tactics, i.e. deliberately targeting civilians for political affects on a different entity, normally the governing or occupying power.

While the term resistance has many variants, most support the idea of an organized political opposition to a governing or occupying power. Often this political opposition, or at least core elements of it, must initially remain clandestine or underground to avoid arrest from the governing or occupying power. This organized political opposition – and the term “organized” spans a spectrum of various degrees from incipient to highly organized – could espouse violent and/or nonviolent measures

in its resistance activities. Violent political struggles are not uncommon in world history, especially in the development of liberty for oppressed groups.

Evolution of Two Sequential and Overlapping Organizations

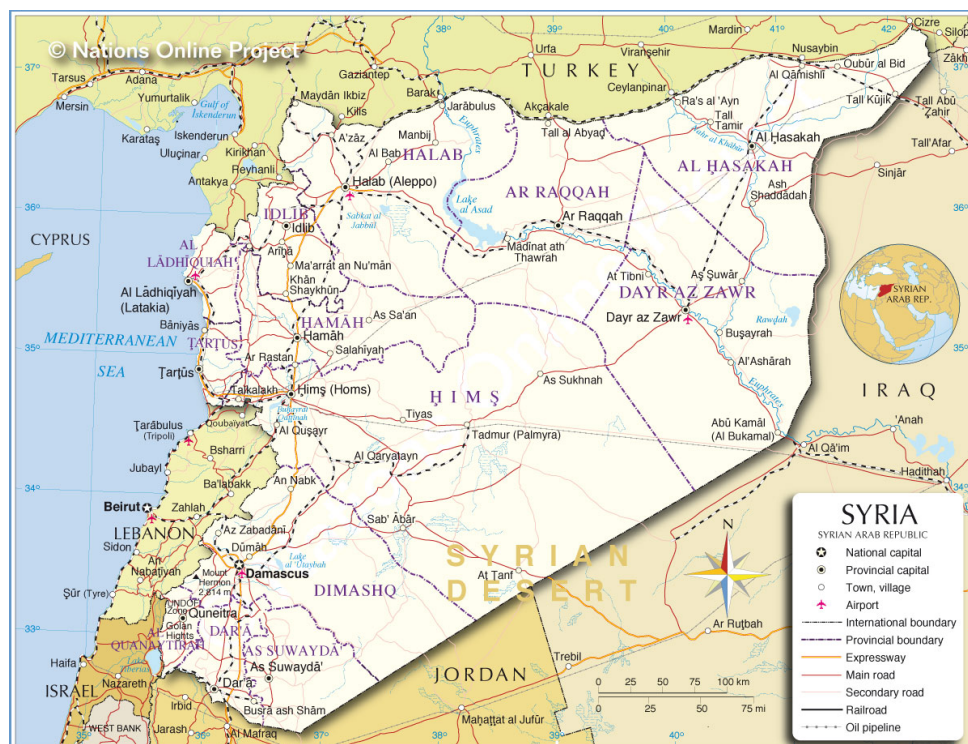
The timeframe of this dissertation extends from March 2011, the beginning of the violence in Deraa, to June 2014, the fall of Mosul and the change of US policy. During this period, the resistance elements evolved both politically and militarily. In the beginning of this period through December 2012, most of the grassroots, bottom-up resistance elements manifested themselves in the entity of the self-proclaimed Free Syrian Army (FSA). These non-extremist, mostly secular fighters, made-up largely of Syrian military defectors, constituted the bulk of the resistance in these early years.

With the formation of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) – subordinate to the political entity of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC) -- in December 2012, the aperture of the resistance changed: it now included a wider variety of resistance elements, not just the secular-minded FSA. The SMC included the Syrian Liberation Front (SLF), a Salafist but not extremist organization, and the Syrian Islamist Front (SIF), which included al-Nusra Front and the Ahrar al-Sham extremist groups. Thus, only portions of the SMC met the litmus test of viable and acceptable resistance elements, as defined and framed in this dissertation.

These two sequential but overlapping organizations roughly align themselves to time periods one and three in the following sections.

In summary, I argue that the viable and acceptable resistance from March 2011 to December 2012 was the Free Syrian Army. From December 2012 to June 2014 the

viable and acceptable resistance rubric expanded to include the SMC, which included the remnants of the FSA and the SLF, but not the SIF. To further describe this evolving resistance and to support my main argument, namely that the Free Syrian Army was the dominant oppositional force in Syria during the early years of the rebellion, the following four sections examine distinct but overlapping time periods, each providing a general description of the period, the political organization and leadership, military operations, and an assessment of the resistance's strength and weaknesses during that specific time period.



Source: <http://www.nationsonline.org/maps/syria-map.jpg>
accessed March 11, 2017

Figure 10: Map of Syria

Time Period 1: The Bottom-Up, Grassroots Rebellion (Summer of 2011 through December 2012)

Description

The resistance had its origins under the oppression of the Hafez Assad regime as described earlier in this chapter. These political, social, and economic grievances festered under Bashar Assad and then erupted within the context of the regional Arab Spring. Dr. Fouad Ajami, in his 2012 book *The Syrian Rebellion*, provided an exceptional analysis of the political, economic, and social underpinnings of the Syrian rebellion during this period. With 32% of the population living below the poverty line, 20% unemployment (57% unemployed for those under 25 years of age), and a rating of 19th out of 22 for economic performance of Arab countries, the basis for social discontent was already strong.⁹⁹

The spark for the Syrian rebellion occurred a few months before the summer of 2011. In March about a dozen boys, aged 10 to 15, from Deraa were arrested for painting anti-Assad graffiti. When they were finally released from their detention, the boys reported their abuse and torture. One boy, Hamza al-Khatib, died during his detention. When residents of Deraa took to the streets, security forces shot and killed several protesters.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Fouad Ajami, *The Syrian Rebellion* (Stanford, CA: The Hoover Institution, 2012), 73-74.

¹⁰⁰ Fouad Ajami, 65, 71. See also *BBC, Syrian Profile Timeline*, accessed at bbc.com on December 10, 2015.

Within Syria the viable and acceptable resistance in the summer of 2011 through December 2014 was a Sunni-based classic local resistance to government repression.¹⁰¹ Violent resistance began in the summer of 2011 and became a threatening force by January 2012.¹⁰² In October 2011 the US Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, described and assessed the resistance as:

“The Syrian protest movement remains very large, widespread, and predominantly peaceful. Yet violence is on the rise, most notably in Hama, Dayr al-Zar, Latakia, around Homs. The Local Coordination Committees (LCC) are trying to keep protests peaceful, but as the regime continues to arrest and kill demonstrators, calls to take-up arms have become more common.”¹⁰³

Political Organization and Leadership

At this time, there was no effective national leadership echelon to this grassroots resistance, neither within Syria nor in the expatriate community. In September 2012, the Syrian National Council (SNC) formed as an umbrella political organization ostensibly uniting liberals, the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists, and Kurds, but since the SNC was dominated by exiles supported by Turkey and Qatar, it had no close connection with the rebels actually doing the

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey White, “The Military Opposition on the Ground,” *Syria’s Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 7.

¹⁰² Ibid., 3.

¹⁰³ Robert S. Ford, *Syria: The Battle for Democracy and Change*, Washington, DC: The Washington Institute, October 18, 2011, accessed at December 31, 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syria-the-battle-for-democracy-and-change>.

fighting.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the inability of the SNC to arrange any significant Western support disappointed and angered most rebel elements.¹⁰⁵

During the 2011 and early 2012 period, provincial military councils formed in Homs, Hama, Idlib, Deraa, and Damascus, each including local Free Syrian Army (FSA) battalions.¹⁰⁶ The local fighters were grassroots guerrillas that emerged from the villages and suburbs to fight first the local security and police and then the Syrian military, as the latter was deployed to restore order. Many of these resistance fighters were defectors from Assad's military, Sunni soldiers who could not bring themselves to fire on the unarmed predominantly Sunni civilians.

In addition to the local fighters, there were three other components to the local resistance. First, there was an openly public political resistance movement that manifested itself with a mixture of some expatriate political opponents and other activists still inside Syria. Another key component of this resistance was the clandestine underground element within Syria.¹⁰⁷ This was manifested in the village or neighborhood Local Coordination Committees, the district or city level Revolutionary Councils, and the major city or provincial Revolution Command

¹⁰⁴ Jeffrey White, "The Military Opposition on the Ground," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 20.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Holliday, *Middle East Security Report 5: Syria's Maturing Insurgency* (WASHINGTON, DC: Institute for the Study of War, June 2012), 7.

¹⁰⁷ Nathan Bos, ed., *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies*, 2nd ed. (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Special Operations Command, 2013), 35-36. This text describes the four components of a resistance as the underground, armed component, auxiliary, and public component.

Councils.¹⁰⁸ The final key component is termed the auxiliary and consisted of the Syrian public, which provided either tacit or expressed support to the resistance. By mid-2013, the national level political-military structure took shape, as displayed in Figure 11.

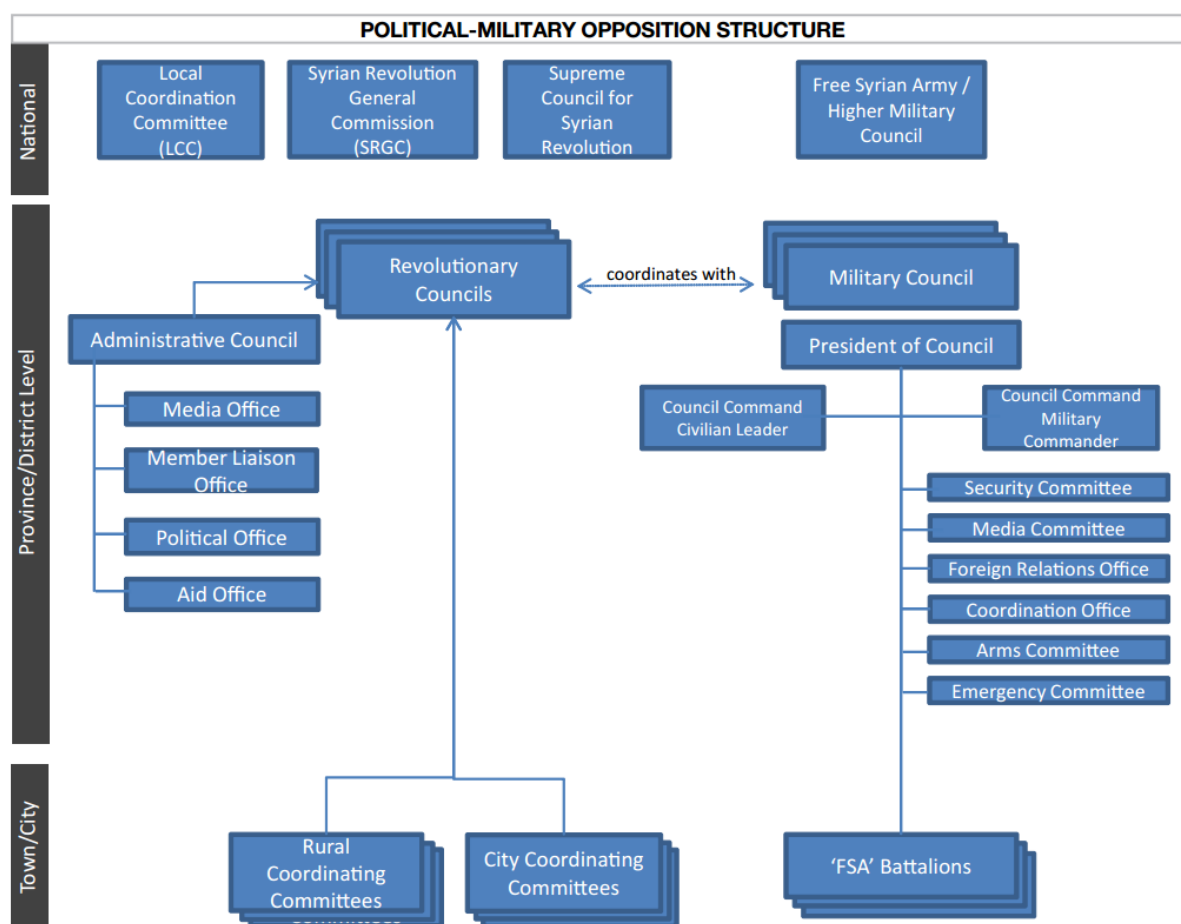


Figure 11: Political-Military Opposition Structure

Source: Institute for the Study of War, *Syria's Maturing Insurgency*, June 2012, 19.

To some extent it is useful to examine line-and-block charts of organizations. But often it is more useful to actually “meet the leaders.” This is

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth O’Bagy, *Middle East Security Report 4: Syria’s Political Opposition* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, April 2012), 16-25.

particularly relevant when one recalls how the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during this period chastised his questioners and critics to actually show him the resistance leaders. To that end, the following section is instrumental. The *Institute for the Study of War* compiled this depiction of the leadership of the FSA in March of 2012. As one can see from the photos, this layout is based on these leaders' announcements on YouTube and Skype sessions where they explained their defections and described their combat activities inside Syria. The depictions of these leaders follow on the next eight pages, beginning with the leadership element based in Turkey and then progressing to show the leaders by their operating regions.¹⁰⁹

The first two of these eight pages show key FSA leaders in Turkey. These commanders included Lieutenant Colonel Hussein Harmoush who founded the Free Officers' Movement in June 2011 and Colonel Riad Asaad, the first commander of the FSA.

¹⁰⁹ Institute for the Study of War, *Syria's Armed Opposition*, March 2012, 39-45.

Free Syrian Army Leadership in Turkey



Lieutenant Colonel Hussein Harmoush

Affiliated With: Free Officers Movement

Area of Operations: N/A

Lieutenant Colonel Harmoush started the Free Officers Movement when he announced his defection in an early June 2011 video statement. Syrian security forces detained Harmoush in mid-September 2011 and executed him in January 2012.



Colonel Riad Asaad

Commander: Free Syrian Army

Area of Operations: N/A

Colonel Riad Asaad formed the Free Syrian Army at the end of July 2011, and by mid-October his umbrella group was affiliated with many of the key rebel groups operating on the ground in Syria.



Colonel Ahmed Hijazi

Deputy Commander: Free Syrian Army

Area of Operations: N/A

Colonel Hijazi escaped to Turkey after his frequently participates in video statements and press interviews from the Free Syrian Army headquarters in Turkey where he acts as a deputy to Colonel Asaad.



Colonel Malik al-Kurdi

Deputy Commander: Free Syrian Army

Area of Operations: N/A

Colonel Malik al-Kurdi escaped to Turkey after his late August defection from the Syrian Navy. He has made numerous video and press statements during his time in with the FSA leadership.



Captain Mohammed Hamdo

Spokesman: Free Syrian Army

Area of Operations: N/A

Captain Mohammed Hamdo has not appeared in video statements but frequently conducts press interviews in which he is cited as a “spokesman” or “senior leader” in the FSA’s media headquarters in Turkey.

Figure 12: Free Syrian Army Leadership in Turkey¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 39.

Free Syrian Army Leadership in Turkey

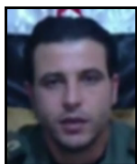


General Mustafa Ahmed al-Sheikh

Commander: Syrian Higher Revolutionary Council

Area of Operations: N/A

General Mustafa al-Sheikh did not defect until late January 2012, but when he did he became the highest ranking officer to defect. He formed the Higher Revolutionary Council outside of the FSA, but the two groups merged in February.

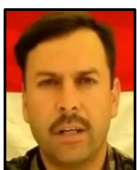


Captain Baseem al-Khalid

Affiliated With: Syrian Higher Revolutionary Council

Area of Operations: N/A

Captain al-Khalid made the video statement that announced the formation of the Higher Revolutionary Council, in which he said he would act as General Mustafa al-Sheikh's aide.



Colonel Abdul Satar Yunsu

Commander: Hamza Battalion

Area of Operations: Idlib city and suburbs

Colonel Yunsu has participated in a number of video statements from the FSA headquarters in Turkey, and ostensibly leads the Hamza Battalion around Idlib. However, there is little evidence that links him to effective rebel groups in Idlib.



Captain Ahyam al-Kurdi

Commander: Qashoush Battalion

Area of Operations: Hama

FSA leadership named Captain al-Kurdi the commander of the Qashoush Battalion in Hama province. While al-Kurdi continues to appear in FSA statements; however, there is little evidence that links him to effective rebel groups in Hama.

Figure 13: Free Syrian Army Leadership in Turkey (continued)¹¹¹

The next five commanders led units in key cities, like Aleppo, Damascus, and Jebel al-Zawiya, all outside of the provincial organizations depicted on subsequent pages.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 39-40.

Free Syrian Army Unit Leaders

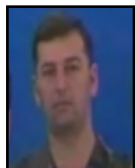


Captain Ammar al-Wawi

Commander: Ababeel Battalion

Area of Operations: Aleppo

Captain al-Wawi ostensibly leads a rebel unit in Aleppo, and he has reported on the groups operations there. However, the frequency of his video and press statements suggest that he has remained in Turkey and has become closely aligned with FSA leaders.

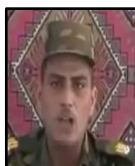


Captain Ibrahim Munir Majmour

Commander: Hourriyeh Battalion

Area of Operations: Aleppo

Captain Majmour participates in several video statements from Turkey in July and September of 2011 before returning to Syria to lead a rebel group in November. It is difficult to attribute limited engagements around Aleppo to Captain Majmour's group.



Major Maher Rahman al-Nuemi

Commander: Moawiyah Bin Abi Sufian Battalion

Area of Operations: Damascus

Major al-Nuemi's oratory skill and press interviews from inside Syria have made him a key figure in the movement. His unit has conducted some of the attacks around Damascus. Unlike other FSA leaders he was initially included by the Higher Revolutionary Council.



Captain Qais Qataneh

Commander: Omari Battalion

Area of Operations: Dera'a province

Captain Qataneh leads the most effective rebel organization on the Hawran plain. He leading raids and ambushes along an arc of small towns and avoids sustained conflict with security forces. He has also coordinated with other rebel units in Dera'a province.



Captain Yousif al-Din Yahya

Commander: Harmoush Battalion

Area of Operations: Jebel al-Zawiya, Idlib

Captain Yahya joined up with FSA leadership in Turkey after his August defection from the Syrian Army. He returned to the mountainous Jebel-al Zawiya region to lead a large rebel force conducting raids and ambushes.

Figure 14: Free Syrian Army Unit Leaders¹¹²

¹¹² Ibid., 40-41.

The following three pages show the FSA commanders and officers operating in Homs province in early 2012.

Khalid bin Walid Brigade, Homs Province



Major Abdul Rahman Sheikh Ali

Commander: Khalid bin Walid Brigade

Area of Operations: Rastan

Major Shiekh Ali became the leader of the armed resistance movement around Homs in September 2011, organizing the various defected officers under the Khalid bin Walid Brigade.

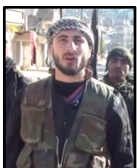


Major Ali Mohammed Ayoub

Commander: Hamza Battalion

Area of Operations: Rastan

Major Ayoub commands Khalid bin Walid's Hamza Battalion. Although he appears to be a late-comer to the broader organization, he played a key role in wresting control of Rastan's western neighborhoods from loyalists in late January 2012.



Lieutenant Ibrahim Ayoub

Deputy Commander: Farouq Battalion

Area of Operations: Rastan

After his defection in July 2010, Lieutenant Ayoub was a key participant in the formation of the Khalid bin Walid Brigade. He currently acts as a leader within the Hamza Battalion and continued his leadership role during the late January 2012 Rastan offensive.

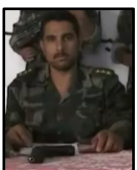


Major Ahmad Bahboh

Affiliated with: Khalid bin Walid Brigade

Area of Operations: Rastan

Major Bahboh was the first leader of Khalid bin Walid in June 2011, and his brother Abdullah has maintained close ties with MAJ Sheikh Ali. Bahboh lead rebels against loyalist forces in Rastan, January-February 2012.



Captain Abdullah Bahboh

Commander: Mohammed Tlas Battalion

Area of Operations: Rastan

Captain Abdullah Bahboh joined his brother Ahmad during initial formation of Khalid bin Walid, and has maintained close ties with Major Sheikh Ali since then, appearing in a number of key video statements. He fought with Ahmad in Rastan in February 2012.

Figure 15: Khalid bin Walid Brigade, Homs Province¹¹³

¹¹³ Ibid., 41-42.

Khalid bin Walid Brigade, Homs Province



Lieutenant Abd al-Razaq Tlass

Commander: Farouq Battalion

Area of Operations: Bab Amr, Homs city

Lieutenant Tlass, nephew of a long-time Syrian Defense Minister, was an inspirational leader in command of Khalid bin Walid's Farouq Battalion in Bab Amr, Homs. He was killed in a regime artillery barrage on 9 February 2012.

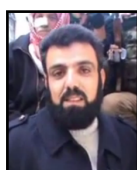


Lieutenant Walid al-Abdullah

Deputy Commander: Farouq Battalion

Area of Operations: Bab Amr, Homs city

Lieutenant al-Abdullah has appeared beside Lieutenant Abd al-Razaq Tlass in both video statements and clips showing the two young defectors working with their militia group inside Homs' Bab Amr neighborhood.

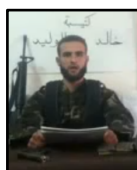


Captain Yousef al-Hamoud

Commander: Fadi al-Qassim Battalion

Area of Operations: Bab Dreib, Homs city

Captain al-Hamoud was one of the first member of Khalid bin Walid under Major Ahmad Bahboh. In January and February 2012 he led rebels against loyalist forces in Homs' Bab Dreib neighborhood.



Lieutenant Faez Ahmed al-Abdullah

Commander: Ali bin Abi Talib Company

Area of Operations: Houleh region, Homs countryside

Lieutenant al-Abdullah participated in early video statements before appearing days after the late September 2011 Rastan battle to announce the Khalid bin Walid Brigade's withdrawal and claim responsibility for effective attacks in the Homs countryside.



Captain Rawad Ahmed al-Aksah

Commander: Special Tasks Battalion

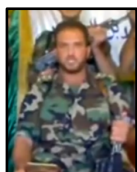
Area of Operations: Zafaraneh

A relative late-comer within Khalid bin Walid, CPT al-Aksah announced his defection at the end of December 2011, when he formed the Special Task Battalion under the leadership of Khalid bin Walid.

Figure 16: Khalid bin Walid Brigade, Homs Province (continued)¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 42.

Khalid bin Walid Brigade, Homs Province

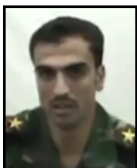


Captain Ayad al-Deek

Affiliated with: Khalid bin Walid Brigade

Area of Operations: Rastan

Captain al-Deek, who has been called Khalid bin Walid's chief of staff, was one of the inaugural members of the organization under Major Ahmad Bahboh, and has participated in a series of video statements claiming responsibility for operations in Rastan.



Lieutenant Ahmed Mustafa Khalaf

Affiliated with: Khalid bin Walid Brigade

Area of Operations: Rastan

Lieutenant Khalaf was one of the first and most respected free officers around Homs after his defection in late June 2011 and subsequent involvement with Khalid bin Walid. He was killed in action during the late September 2011 regime assault on Rastan.

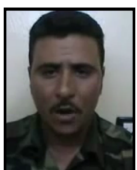


Lieutenant Mohammed Abd al-Aziz Tlass

Affiliated with: Khalid bin Walid Brigade

Area of Operations: Rastan

Lieutenant Abd al-Aziz Tlass ambushed security forces along the road from Homs to Rastan in September and fought in Rastan at the end of that. He has not appeared in video statements since then, and may have been killed.



Lieutenant Amjad al-Hamid

Affiliated with: Khalid bin Walid Brigade

Area of Operations: Rastan

Lieutenant al-Hamid was an early member of the Rastan Free Officer's movement before joining Khalid bin Walid in September 2011. The Rastan native appeared in a number of key video statements during Khalid bin Walid's formative period.



Lieutenant Omar Shamsi

Affiliated With: Khalid bin al-Walid Brigade

Area of Operations: Rastan

Lieutenant Shamsi was an early member of the Rastan Free Officer's movement before joining Khalid bin Walid in September 2011. He appeared in a number of key video statements during Khalid bin Walid's formative period.

Figure 17: Khalid bin Walid Brigade, Homs Province (continued)¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

The following two pages show the FSA commanders and officers operating in the Hama area in early 2012.

Hama Countryside & South Idlib



Captain Zuhair Al-Sheikh

Commander: Osama bin Zaid Battalion

Area of Operations: Idlib & Hama

Captain al-Sheikh announce his defection, joining the Abou al-Fidaa Battalion in early November. At the end of that month, he announced the formation of the Osama bin Zaid Battalion from the head of over 75 rebels organized into 5 'companies.'



Lieutenant Ayman Hallaq

Affiliated with: Abou al-Fidaa, Osama bin Zaid Battalions

Area of Operations: Northern Hama countryside

Lieutenant Hallaq appears alternately as the commander of the Mohammed Hussein al-Hallaq Company and the Iman bin Hussein Abdallah Company. In February 2012 his unit captured and then released 11 Iranian pilgrims travelling through Hama.

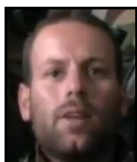


Lieutenant Abdel Majid Ayoub

Commander: Kifah Sirmala Company, Osama bin Zaid Bn

Area of Operations: Khan Shaykhun, Idlib

Lieutenant Ayoub has appeared as a 'company' commander under Zuhair al-Sheikh. In an early December video statement claimed credit for defending a demonstration in Khan Shaykhun and destroying armored troop carriers in the engagement.

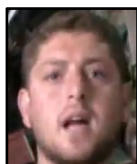


Lieutenant Mohammed Base

Commander: Mohammed al-Sheikh Company, Osama bin Zaid Bn

Area of Operations: Idlib & Hama

Lieutenant Base has appeared in two videos with Cptain Zuhair al-Sheikh as a subordinate leader in his organization.



Lieutenant Mahmoud Ahmed Hummadi

Commander: Hassan Al-Hassan Company, Osama bin Zaid Bn

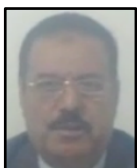
Area of Operations: Idlib & Hama

Lieutenant Hummadi has appeared in two videos with Cptain Zuhair al-Sheikh as a subordinate leader in his organization..

Figure 18: Hama Countryside & South Idlib¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 43-44.

Hama Countryside & South Idlib



Brigadier General Radwan al-Madloush

Commander: Suleiman Battalion

Area of Operations: Maarat al-Numan, Idlib

General Madloush defected Air Force Intelligence, a rare example of defection from the regime intelligence apparatus. The FSA named him commander of the Suleiman Battalion in Idlib. Loyalist forces killed him when they raided his safe house in November 2011

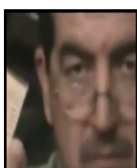


Captain Zahir Abdul Karim

Affiliated With: Suleiman Battalion

Area of Operations: Karnaz & Muhradeh, Hama

Captain Karim claimed responsibility for some of the earliest effective attacks against regime convoys travelling through the Hama countryside in September 2011. He was severely wounded in the same raid that killed Radwan al-Madloush.

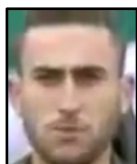


Colonel Adnan Hallaq

Affiliated With: Abou al-Fidaa Battalion

Area of Operations: Hama

Colonel Hallaq defected in December 2011 with a small group of soldiers, announcing his plans to join the Abou al-Fidaa battalion of the Free Syrian Army "under the leadership of Riad Asaad.

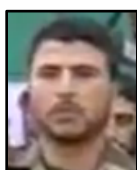


Lieutenant Talal al-Masri

Affiliated With: Khouder al-Sharif Company, Osama bin Zaid Bn

Area of Operations: Kafr Nabuda, Hama

Lieutenant al-Masri announced his defection from Syrian Special Forces in December 2011 and appeared in mid-February video, stating his connection to both Osama bin Zaid and Abou al-Fidaa Battalions before engaging regime forces with an advanced AT weapon.



Lieutenant Mohammed al-Khal

Affiliated With: Kouder al-Sharif Company, Osama bin Zaid Bn

Area of Operations: Kafr Nabuda, Hama

In December 2011 Lieutenant Mohammed al-Khal announced his defection from the Syrian Army and the formation of the Khouder a-Sharif Company of the Osama bin Zaid Battalion.

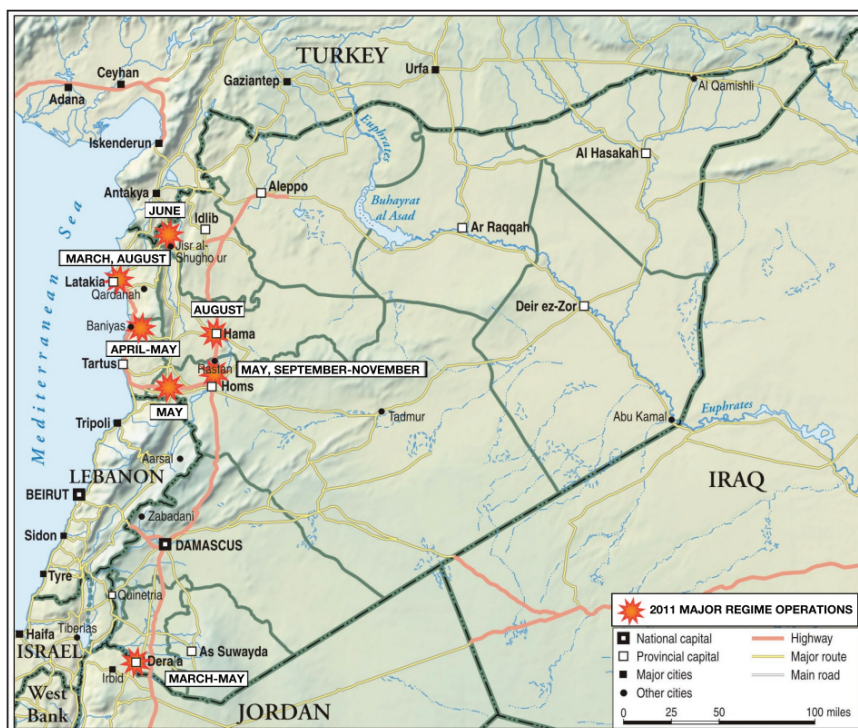
Figure 19: Hama Countryside & South Idlib (continued)¹¹⁷

To summarize the annotated photos of the previous eight pages, these self-identified leaders described their defections, activities, and intentions on publically available media. To an outsider, it is probably difficult to understand why and how the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 44-45.

US military and intelligence community failed to see, understand, and present such information to senior US military leaders. (But that is the subject of the next chapter.)

Military Operations



MAP 3 | 2011 MAJOR REGIME OPERATIONS

Source: Institute for the Study of War, *The Struggle for Syria in 2011*, December 2011, 12.

Figure 20: Fighting in 2011

In March 2011, protests began in Deraa, which were immediately suppressed by regime forces.¹¹⁸ The resistance spread to Homs in May, but by September the regime was effectively reacting to those events.¹¹⁹ Demonstrations then flared in Damascus,

¹¹⁸ Joseph Holliday, *Middle East Security Report 2: The Struggle for Syria in 2011* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, December 2011), 7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

but never materialized to the extent of threatening the regime.¹²⁰ Then the first significant armed resistance emerged in the border area with Turkey in June.¹²¹ The regime fought back again, only to have the armed resistance re-appear in Idlib by October, by some reports under the direction of the Free Syrian Army.¹²²

By the spring and summer of 2012, the rebels extended their control over large areas of northern Syria.¹²³ Indeed, fighting had spread throughout most of Syria.¹²⁴ In March 2012 the three most effective rebel units inside Syria included the Khalid bin Walid Brigade operating near Homs, the Harmoush Battalion in the northern Jebel al-Zaiya mountains, and the Omari Battalion in the southern Hawran plain.¹²⁵ Figure 21 depicts the above-mentioned Harmoush Battalion and Figure 22 shows a map of the fighting by March 2012.



HARMOUSH BATTALION STANDS IN FORMATION IN JEBEL AL-ZAWIYA, DECEMBER 2011.

Source: Institute for the Study of War, *Syria's Armed Opposition*, March 2012, 27.

Figure 21: Harmoush Battalion in Formation, March 2012

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Jeffrey White, "The Military Opposition on the Ground," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 3.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁵ Joseph Holliday, *Middle East Security Report 3: Syria's Armed Opposition* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, March 2012), 6.



Source: Institute for the Study of War, *Syria's Armed Opposition*, March 2012, 8.
 Note: References to page numbers in this map refer to the original ISW publication, not this dissertation.

Figure 22: Map of Fighting, March 2012

By June 2012, liberated rebel safe zones appeared in Idlib, as shown in the map in Figure 23, and resistance activities progressed, as shown in the map of Figure 24. At this time, the private research group *Institute for the Study of War* was publishing not only detailed line-and-block organizational charts, but also the analytically more significant link-diagram charts detailing the various subordinate leaders and their relationships with others. These link-diagram charts identified and displayed the rebels' military councils and leaders in Homs, Hama, Idlib, and Deraa.



Source: Institute for the Study of War, *Syria's Maturing Insurgency*, June 2012, 12.

Figure 23: Rebel Safe Zones in Idlib



Source: Institute for the Study of War, *Syria's Maturing Insurgency*, June 2012, 8.
 Note: References to page numbers in this map refer to the original ISW publication, not this dissertation.

Figure 24: Map of Fighting, June 2012

By the winter of 2012 to 2013, the rebels controlled large portions of Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqa, and Deir Ezzor plus portions of Homs province, Quneitra, Daraa, and Hasaka provinces.¹²⁶

Strength and Weaknesses

By May 2012 this non-extremist resistance force grew to 40,000 fighters.¹²⁷ However, that number can be misleading since there was a wide spectrum of capabilities within that seemingly impressive number. That said, even during this period it was possible for researchers to discern the capable from the not-so-capable units. The below chart is an example of one of those assessments that triages the various rebel units between those that were effective and affiliated with the FSA, those displaying little evidence of their effectiveness, those with the FSA but infrequently engaging regime units, and those claiming to operate in areas with little to no reported engagements.

¹²⁶ Jeffrey White, "The Military Opposition on the Ground," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 3.

¹²⁷ Joseph Holliday, *Middle East Security Report 5: Syria's Maturing Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, June 2012), 7.

Unit Name	Area of Ops	Commander	Unit Name	Area of Ops	Commander
These four rebel groups have both fought regime forces and demonstrated their affiliation with the Free Syrian Army headquarters.			These five groups are close to the Free Syrian Army headquarters but have not engaged security forces as frequently or effectively.		
Khalid bin Walid	Homs	Abdul Rahman Sheikh Ali	Houriyeh	Aleppo	Ibrahim Majbour
Harmoush	Jebel al-Zawiya	Yousif Yahya	Ababeel	Aleppo	Ammar al-Wawi
Omari	Dera'a	Qais Qataneh	Salahdin al-Ayoubi	Jisr al-Shughour	Ala'adin
Abou al-Fidaa	Hama	-----	Moawiyah bin Sufian	Damascus	Maher Rahman Nueimi
There is little evidence that these six units are effective, despite the fact that they claim to operate in places where attacks have been frequent. Other rebel groups are more likely to be responsible for this activity.			There is little evidence that these seven groups are effective, because they claim to operate in areas with little to no reported rebel engagements.		
Hamza	Idlib city	Abdul Sattar Yunsu	al-Suqur	Latakia	Mohammed Ousso
Qashoush	Hama	Ahyam al-Kurdi	al-Qassam	Jableh, Latakia	Mazen Ezzein
Saad bin Moaz	Al-Ghab, Hama	-----	Samer Nunu	Baniyas, Tartous	Riyad Ahmad
Omar	Al-Qusayr, Homs	-----	Sultan Pasha Atrash	As-Suwayda	-----
Moaz al-Raqad	Deir ez-Zor	-----	Odai al-Tayi	Al-Hasakah	-----
Allah Akhbar	Abu Kamal	-----	Mishaal Tammo	Qamishli	-----
			Ahmad Nayif Sukhni	Ar-Raqqah	-----

CHART 1 | THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY'S OCTOBER 12, 2011 VIDEO STATEMENT COUNTED 22 SUBORDINATE UNITS, RANGING IN EFFECTIVENESS & CREDIBILITY.

Source: Institute for the Study of War, *Syria's Armed Opposition*, March 2012, 15.

Figure 25: Free Syrian Army Units, March 2012

During this period, the rebels enjoyed an increase in the number of recruits and the provision of significant quantities of arms and ammunition, primarily from captured regime stocks.¹²⁸ The rebels now had heavy machine guns, shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles, mortars, recoilless rifles, and artillery rocket launchers.¹²⁹ External sources of arms and ammunition reportedly came from the Gulf States and Western countries, with the weapons smuggled in through Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq.¹³⁰ The rebels seized facilities and inflicted losses on regime forces, all while the government forces became less capable.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Jeffrey White, "The Military Opposition on the Ground," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

Although conventional military personnel and researchers would judge such a loose organization without a unified political organization as a negative feature,¹³² to a rebellion or insurgency this is a desirable feature as it denies the regime the ability to identify and then strike a critical command and control headquarters or leader. The diffused nature of any rebellion is useful and often necessary for its survival in these early stages.

The resistance was still weak in its ability to forge cooperation above the tactical fighting level. Moreover, of significance, extremist Islamist fighters that later announced themselves as ISIS began to emerge on the battlefields.¹³³ I will describe this in detail in the following time period section.

Despite the rebels growing strength by the late summer, in relative terms the tide began to turn, primarily due to Iran, Lebanese Hizballah, and Iraqi Shia militias direct and increasing involvement in the fighting. As another researcher wrote, “Without this assistance, the regime’s downward trajectory very likely would have continued and perhaps even steepened.”¹³⁴ I detail the Iranian involvement later in this chapter.

Time Period 2: The Sunni Extremists Rise and Eventually Dominate the Anti-Assad Fight (September 2012 through June 2014 and later)

¹³² Ibid., 10.

¹³³ Elizabeth O’Bagy, *Middle East Security Report 6: Jihad in Syria* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, September 2012), 6, 18, 21-26.

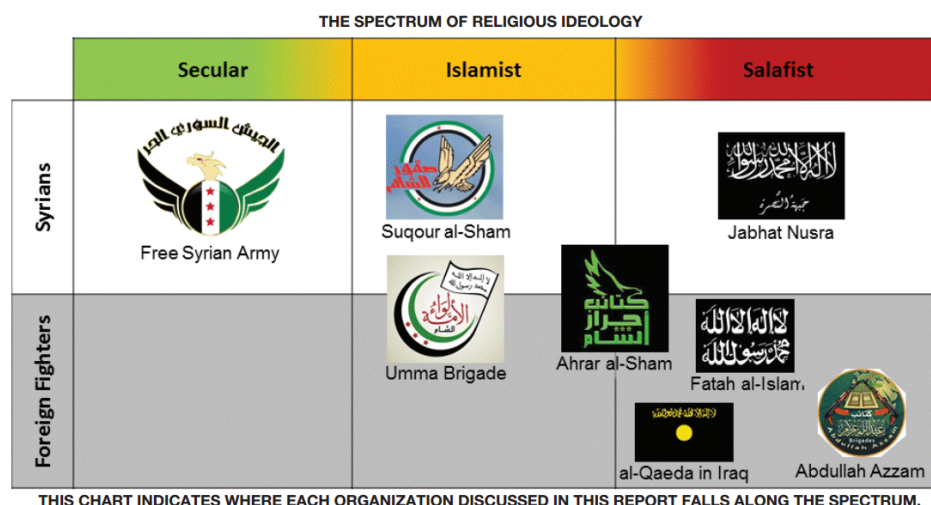
¹³⁴ Jeffrey White, “The Military Opposition on the Ground,” *Syria’s Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 4.

Description

By September 2012, however, other groups emerged on the battlefield as well. Figure 26 shows the array of various rebel groups along a religious ideology spectrum. Extremist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra, Fatah al-Islam, and al Qaeda in Iraq (predecessor organization of ISIS) appeared, while less extreme Islamist groups like Ahrar al-Sham appeared, too. These latter Islamist groups rejected the killing of innocents and working with al Qaeda, but were still markedly distinct from the more secular FSA, which did remain the largest force in the 2012 to 2013 period.

Of significance to this dissertation and the definition of the viable and acceptable resistance, neither Jabhat al-Nusra nor Ahrar al-Sham fit the criteria of “acceptable.” In Jabhat al-Nusra’s case, neither its political goals nor terrorist tactics were acceptable. In Ahrar al-Sham’s case, its political goal of establishing an Islamist state in Syria was not congruent with US objectives. The fact that Ahrar al-Sham would eventually lead the umbrella group Syrian Islamic Front (SIF) as part of the SOC would complicate US support to the SOC.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Aaron Y. Zelin, “Causes for Pause: Spoilers and Risks,” *Syria’s Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 28.



Source: Institute for the Study of War, *Jihad in Syria*, September 2012, 18.

Figure 26: Spectrum of Ideology, September 2012

Political Organization and Leadership

In the 2012 to 2013 period, the two major fighting elements that can be described as violent Salafists were Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham. The former was established July 2011 and led by Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, who pledged his support to al Qaeda's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.¹³⁶ The latter, Ahrar al-Sham, publically announced itself in January 2012 and is led by Abu Abdullah al-Hamawi.¹³⁷

Although both groups are violent Salafists, they have distinctly different political goals and objectives. Jabhat al-Nusra, an off-shoot and affiliate of al Qaeda, has trans-regional and global aspirations and has no reservations about attacking innocent men, woman, and children if it serves the larger purpose of influencing political leaders to

¹³⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 25-28.

alter their course – the classic definition of terrorism.¹³⁸ Indeed, the US officially declared Jabhat al-Nusra a terrorist organization on December 11, 2012.¹³⁹

By contrast, Ahrar al-Sham has not practiced such terrorist tactics and has not called for a global caliphate; instead, it advocated for the establishment of an Islamic state only within Syria.¹⁴⁰

Military Operations

Unlike most of the grassroots resistance elements described elsewhere in this chapter, Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham operated throughout the country. This can be at least partially explained due to the groundwork (the underground) laid by Jabhat al-Nusra's predecessor al Qaeda in Iraq inside Syria during the US-Iraq war. It can also be explained by the role of foreign fighters who entered the conflict in Syria without the responsibility of defending their hometowns and villages that is inherent in any grassroots resistance element.

Both Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham had forces deployed in each of the geographic fronts of the fighting. In most cases, both Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham partnered with non-extremist resistance elements to orchestrate tactical military operations against regime forces. Indeed, many of the military engagements described earlier in this chapter included elements from Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 27.

Strength and Weaknesses

Some researchers assessed that the Salafist groups Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham became stronger relative to the other groups due to better foreign support and more effective governance in areas they controlled.¹⁴¹ Others have noted that their ascendancy is at least partially attributable to the lack of Western leadership and support to the more moderate factions, like the FSA.¹⁴² Another factor attributed to the rise of these Salafist groups is their better performance at addressing local grievances than the other groups, including the FSA.¹⁴³

Acknowledging that obtaining an exact count of such irregular forces while fighting was still occurring was difficult and obviously imprecise, some researchers suggested that Jabhat al-Nusra's strength was between 5,000 and 10,000 fighters by early 2013.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Ahrar al-Sham's strength was estimated at 5,000 to 6,000 fighters during this same period.¹⁴⁵ These personnel numbers are much lower than the estimates for the FSA, but their fighting ability was consistently rated as higher due to the better outside support they received from their sponsors and their ideological commitment and motivation.

¹⁴¹ Patrick Clawson, "Introduction: Posing the Question," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 1.

¹⁴² Aaron Y. Zelin, "Causes for Pause: Spoilers and Risks," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 25.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 28.

Time Period 3: The Emergence of Political and Military Leadership in Exile (December 2012 through June 2014 and later)

Description

November and December 2012 was a significant time period marking the establishment of both political and military nodes at the national echelons for the resistance, although both nodes remained outside of Syria. In December the United States Government (USG) and much of the international community recognized this national political entity as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people -- not an inconsequential event.

Prior to this time, the resistance was a grassroots, bottom-up led activity. Now it had a national-level political organization, albeit outside of Syria for its own security, that presumably would unify behind a common political vision. Moreover, a centralized military organization would supposedly provide a specific node for outside military assistance to then funnel weapons, ammunition, and logistics support to the resistance. This section describes the evolution of these political and military organizations, their leadership, and analyzes the strengths and weaknesses inherent in these developments.

Political Organization and Leadership

In November 2012, the Syrian National Council met in Qatar and transitioned its authority to the newly founded National Coalition for Syrian

Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC).¹⁴⁶ In December 2012 in Morocco, the United States and its partners in the Friends of Syria framework, recognized the SOC as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.¹⁴⁷ The SOC formed a military component, the Supreme Military Council (SMC) to manage the armed resistance.¹⁴⁸ Over time both of these organizations evolved with changing relationships to other groups. Of note, the FSA, headquartered in Turkey, also associated itself with the SMC; yet other FSA units and other non-FSA units were also active as grassroots fighting elements inside Syria.¹⁴⁹

On December 7 in Antalya, Turkey, the various rebel groups agreed to merge their coordination efforts into one organization, the Supreme Joint Military Command Council (SMC) in an effort to provide both a coordination platform for military operations and to provide a more streamlined conduit for funding support from the various foreign countries assisting the different rebel groups.¹⁵⁰ By this time the rebels had organized themselves into five major fronts (northern, Homs, southern, western/middle, and eastern fronts) each with varying combinations of fighters including forces from the Syrian Liberation Front, Syrian Islamic Front,

¹⁴⁶ Jeffrey White, "The Military Opposition on the Ground," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 21.

¹⁴⁷ *U.S. Policy Toward Syria: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 113th Cong. 11 (2013) (statement of Ambassador Robert Ford, U.S. Ambassador to Syria).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁹ Holliday, *Syria's Maturing Insurgency*, 9-10.

¹⁵⁰ Jeffrey White, "The Military Opposition on the Ground," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 21.

Jabhat Nusra, and other units.¹⁵¹ Of significance, this new SMC structure merged the previously separate support networks from Saudi Arabia and Qatar.¹⁵²

While the grassroots elements of the rebellion existed inside Syria, the senior political and military leaders were in sanctuaries outside the country. Moaz al-Khatib, an Imam from the Umayyad Mosque, the largest mosque in Damascus, became the President of the SOC.¹⁵³ General Salim Idriss became the leader of its military component, the SMC.¹⁵⁴ The US provided \$117 million in non-lethal assistance to the SOC in 2012-2013, which included training for over 1500 local leaders and activists inside of Syria.¹⁵⁵



Source: voltairenet.org

Figure 27: Moaz al-Khatib, President of the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC)

¹⁵¹ Elizabeth O'Bagy, *Middle East Security Report: The Free Syrian Army* (WASHINGTON, DC: Institute for the Study of War, March 2013), 6.

¹⁵² Jeffrey White, "The Military Opposition on the Ground," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 21.

¹⁵³ *U.S. Policy Toward Syria*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ *U.S. Policy Toward Syria*, 10.

¹⁵⁵ *U.S. Policy Toward Syria*, 11.



Source: chronicle.co.zw

Figure 28: General Salim Idriss, leader of the Supreme Military Council (SMC)

The following chart shows the structure of the Supreme Military Council.¹⁵⁶

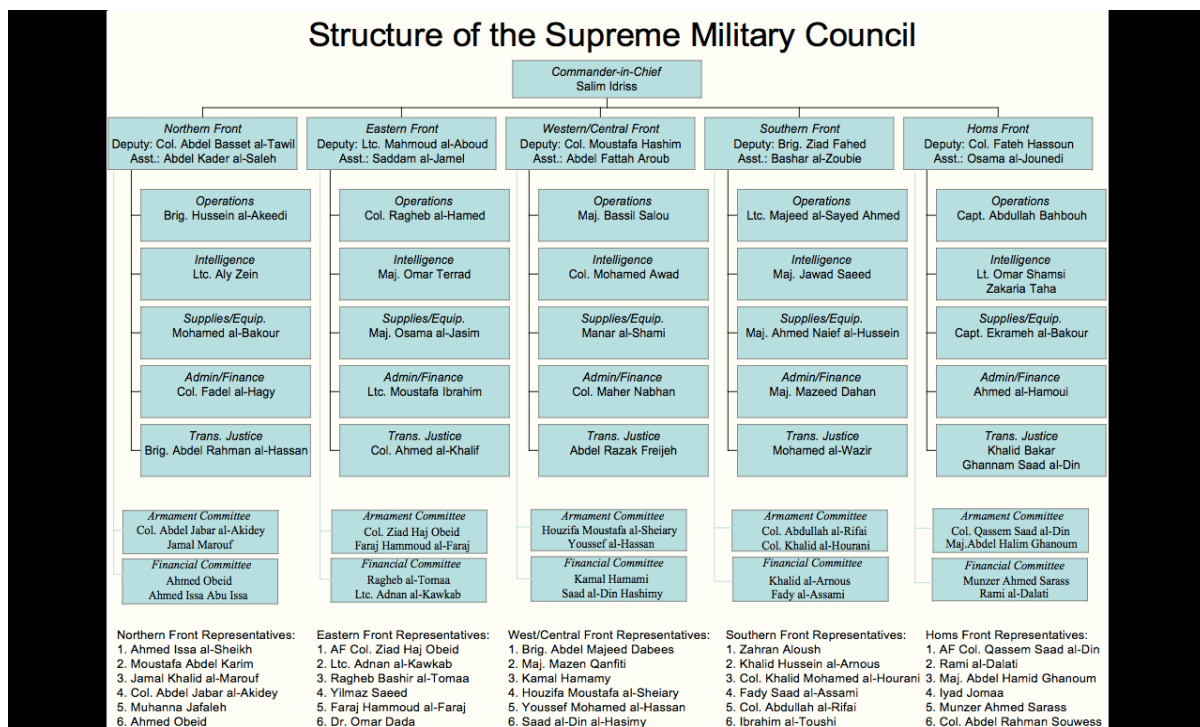
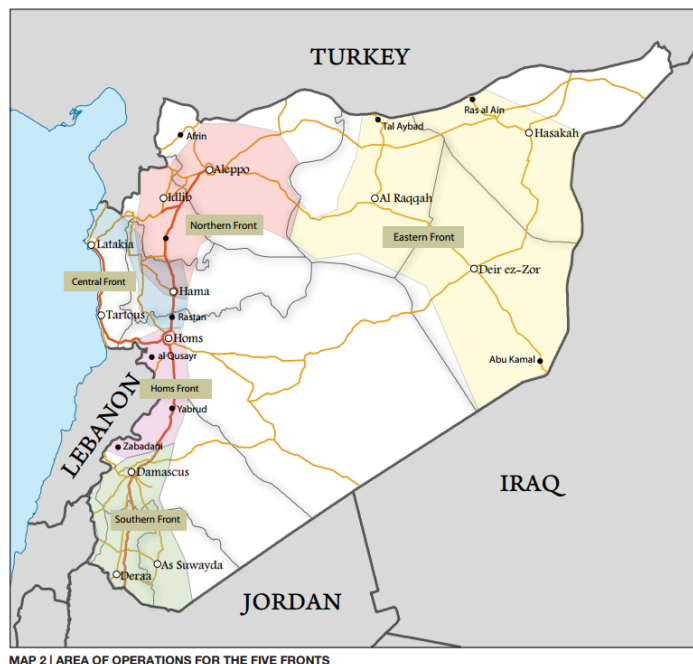


Figure 29: Structure of the Supreme Military Council

¹⁵⁶Jeffrey White, "The Military Opposition on the Ground," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 22. A clearer version of this same graphic was accessed from <http://sspolicyblog.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/smc-structure.jpg> on September 30, 2017.

By March 2013 the resistance organized into five fronts as depicted below.



Source: Institute for the Study of War, *The Free Syrian Army*, March 2013, 18.

Figure 30: The Five Fronts and their Areas of Operation, March 2013










































Of significant note, however, for all the advantages inherent in such an umbrella organization as the SMC, there were some disadvantages. The resistance, as embodied now in the SMC, was not just limited to secular defectors from the Syrian military and other grassroots local fighters. Salafist organizations were now part of the formal political structure of the resistance.¹⁵⁷ The color codes in Figure 31 are noteworthy: this figure shows the integration of three ideologically distinct organizations integrated into geographical commands





¹⁵⁷ Jeffrey White, "The Military Opposition on the Ground," *Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 22.

fighting the regime.¹⁵⁸ The yellow icons represent units of the Syrian Liberation Front (SLF); units that supported FSA units, but not the leadership in Turkey. The blue icons represent units of the Syrian Islamic Front (SIF), which had a Salafist ideology, aspired to a theocratic state, but were Syrian and without global or regional ambitions. The red icons represent units of Jabhat al-Nusra, an al Qaeda affiliate with local, regional, and ultimately global ambitions. This triage of these units is important for two reasons. First, for local and tactical survival and effectiveness against the regime, the various forces united despite their ideological differences. Second, in terms of the “viable and acceptable” litmus test for the resistance, the SLF would be acceptable, but not the SIF or, of course, Jabhat Nusra. This complicated matters for US policy makers and planners, but it should not have been a showstopper. However, it could also be reasonably argued that if the US had channelized military support to the FSA and SLF, while denying support to the SIF, the US would have strengthened the very units whose goals were aligned with those of the US.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ The description of these units is found in Elizabeth O’Bagy, *Middle East Security Report 4: Syria’s Political Opposition* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, April 2012), 38-39.

¹⁵⁹ Jeffrey White, “The Military Opposition on the Ground,” *Syria’s Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 23-24.

NORTHERN FRONT		HOMS FRONT		SOUTHERN FRONT		WESTERN/MIDDLE FRONT	
	Suqor al-Sham		Farouq Battalions		Farouq Battalions		Suqor al-Sham
	Farouq Battalions		Shaheed Ahmed Ouda Battalion		Liwa Islam		Farouq Battalions
	Tawheed Brigade		Mohammed ibn Abdullah Battalion		Ansar al-Islam		Al-Iman Brigade
	Farouq al-Shamal Battalion		Jund Allah Battalion		Al-Iman Combat Brigades		Ansar al-Sham Brigades
	Ahrar al-Sham		Homs Brigade		Al-Hamza bin Abdul-Mutallab Brigade		Jabhat Nusra
	Harakat al-Fajar al-Islamiyya		Qal'at Homs Battalion		Suqor al-Islam		
	Mus'ab bin Ameer Brigade		Shuhada Baba Amr Battalion		Saraya al-Maham al-Khassa		
	Jama'at at al-Tali'a al-Islamiyya		Fursan al-Haq Battalion		Khalid bin Walid Brigade		
	Shuhada Suriya Brigade		Liwa al-Haq		Al-Furqan Brigade		
	Fajr al-Islam Battalion		Al-Haqq Brigade		Ahfad al-Rasul Brigade		
	Dara al-Thawra Brigade		Jabhat Nusra		Jabhat Nusra		
	Harakat Fajr al-Islamiyya						
	Umma Brigade						
	Jabhat Nusra						

LEGEND	
	Syrian Liberation Front
	Syrian Islamic Front
	Jabhat Nusra
	Separate Brigades







Eastern Front	
	Deir ez-Zour Revolutionary Council
	Suqor al-Kurd Brigade
	Suqor Homs Battalion
	Amr bin al-A'as Brigade
	Jeish al-Tawheed
	Jabhat Nusra

FIGURE 4 | OPPOSITION GROUPS BY FRONT

Source: Institute for the Study of War, *The Free Syrian Army*, March 2013, 39.

Figure 31: Opposition Groups by Front, March 2013

Military Operations

During this period, rebels seized the majority of the eastern sections of Syria including the provincial capital of al-Raqqa in March 2013. However, in the western portions of Syria (e.g. Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Damascus) the fighting essentially stalemated.¹⁶⁰ It appeared to some researchers that the rebels had reached their limit in their ability to challenge regime strongholds.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth O'Bagy, *The Free Syrian Army* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, March 2013), 6.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Major General Idriss of the SMC stated that the top priority for the rebels would be to attack and seize regime airfields, targeting the regime's strength and capabilities for air support.¹⁶² When the rebel's northern front conducted their operations in the Idlib and Aleppo areas during this period, they correspondingly focused on seizing the Taftanaz airfield, which they did on January 11, 2013.¹⁶³ The rebels subsequently seized the airfield at al-Jarra.¹⁶⁴ In the eastern front, in addition to seizing al-Raqqa city, the rebels seized Syria's largest hydroelectric dam at al-Thawra and then placed the airfield at Deir ez-Zour under siege.¹⁶⁵ In the central/west front, the rebels strengthened their positions in Jabal al-Akrad and Jabal al-Turkman, causing the local Alawite population to flee to Tartus and Latakia.¹⁶⁶ In the Homs front, the rebels were forced to withdraw from Homs city due to regime counterattacks.¹⁶⁷ In the southern front, rebels captured the Marj al-Sultan airport on the outskirts of Damascus on November 12, 2012.¹⁶⁸ Violence in Damascus escalated during this period, due in part to coordinated FSA and Jabhat al-Nusra operations.¹⁶⁹

Strength and Weaknesses

In April 2013 Ambassador Ford, provided this assessment of the opposition during this period:

¹⁶² Ibid., 23.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 27.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

“The balance on the ground already has changed against the regime, and if you look at a map of what the regime controls now compared to what it controlled four or five months ago, you will see that the armed opposition has made steady, slow but steady gains.”¹⁷⁰

Other researchers have highlighted weaknesses; a shortage of heavy weapons, inadequate logistics, weak command structures, ideological divisions, and disconnection from political opposition.¹⁷¹

Casualties on both sides climbed during this period. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated that as of June 2013, the number killed amounted to:¹⁷²

13,539 Syrian rebels

2,518 foreign fighters (minus Lebanese Hizballah and other Iranian Shia militias)

25,407 Syrian soldiers

17,311 pro-regime, *shabbiha* irregular fighters and pro-regime militias

169 Lebanese Hizballah fighters

It was hoped that the formation of the SMC would assist in battlefield successes, too, but the legitimacy of the rebellion was ultimately based on the

¹⁷⁰ *US Policy Toward Syria*. Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, 113th Congress, April 11, 2013, 34.

¹⁷¹ Patrick Clawson, “Introduction: Posing the Question,” *Syria’s Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 1.

¹⁷² Jeffrey White, “The Military Opposition on the Ground,” *Syria’s Military Opposition: How Effective, United or Extremist?* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013), 13.

effectiveness of the fighting forces on the ground and not the higher-level headquarters in exile. On the other hand, if the SMC had become an effective conduit for the receipt and allocation of targeted US military support to select rebel units, it could be argued, such an efficient transfusion of aid could have inspired and led to greater tactical results on the battlefield.

Although the rebel's strength grew during these three years, the resistance never approached the capability to topple the Assad regime. That is not surprising, however, for two key reasons. First, the US military never provided assistance until the December 2014 Train and Equip legislation was signed into law, with assistance not beginning until 2015.¹⁷³ Second, by contrast, the large scale intervention to support the Assad regime forces provided by Iran, Lebanese Hizballah, and Iranian-sponsored Iraqi Shia militia groups Kata'ib Hizballah (KH) and Asa'ib Ahi al-Haq (AAH) escalated in 2012-13. This re-balance of power effectively checked the developing moderate resistance force strength and capabilities. The final tipping point then occurred when Russia intervened with its own military forces in September 2015. Moreover, in the closing years of this period in late 2013 and early 2014, as the extremist Islamist rebel units (ISIS and al Nusrah Front) received arms, ammunition, and other military support from other suppliers, individual grassroots and otherwise moderate fighters were enticed to join the ranks of these better-equipped and capable units.

¹⁷³ Congressional Research Services, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and US Response* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service report RL33487, October 9, 2015), 3.

Time Period 4: Iranian Quds Force, Lebanese Hizballah, and other Iranian Surrogates Shift the Balance of Forces (February 2013 through June 2014 and later)

Description

As early of 2011, it was evident that Iran had deployed a multi-prong advisory effort into Syria to assist the Assad regime's fight against the rebellion. The advisory effort included specialists from the Iranian ground forces, intelligence, law enforcement, and special forces organizations. Some would argue that such a deployment of forces, perhaps characterized as advisors, is not much different than US advisory efforts in other crisis areas of the world. However, the Iranian effort also involved the commitment of its surrogate force Lebanese Hizballah, the deployment of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Forces (IRGC-QF) trained Shia militants from Iraq, and the formation of Syrian militant groups. By early 2013, if not before, it became unmistakably clear that Lebanese Hizballah (LH), Shia militants from Iraq, and militants formed and trained from within Syria, all under the guidance and direction of the IRGC-QF, were directly engaged in combat operations and were able to ultimately shift the balance of forces in favor of the regime.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ For a concise report of these activities and events, see Will Fulton, Joseph Holiday, and Sam Wyer, *Iranian Strategy in Syria* (Washington, DC: Joint Report by the American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project and the Institute for the Study of War, May 2012).

One element that confirms these activities well before February 2013 is the US Department of Treasury's designation of the IRGC-QF Commander, Qassan Suleimani, for his role in the "violent repression against the Syrian people" in May 2011.¹⁷⁵ The following month, the European Union sanctioned the IRGC's intelligence chief Hossein Taeb for his role in helping the "Syrian regime suppress protests."¹⁷⁶ Additional Treasury designations in 2011-2012 designated three Iranian airlines, Yas Air, Iran Air, and Mahan Air, for their roles in smuggling weapons and personnel into Syria.¹⁷⁷

A second element that confirms these activities is the words from the leaders themselves. In April 2013, LH's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, along with the leadership of the Iraqi militants Kata'ib Hizballah (KH) and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), confirmed their involvement in combat operations in Syria.¹⁷⁸

Political Organization and Leadership

With the IRGC-QF immediately subordinate to the Iranian Supreme Leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei, there is no doubt that Khamenei is responsible for authorizing and ordering these activities. Under his direction, a combined expeditionary force of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Ground Forces (IRGC-GF), Quds Forces, intelligence services, and law enforcement elements operated inside Syria in support of the Assad regime.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 6.

In executing these activities, the IRCG-QF Commander, Qassan Suleimani, undoubtedly played the key leadership role in orchestrating the involvement of LH, KH, AAH, and the various Syrian militia units.

Military Operations

In the early years of the rebellion, LH simply augmented regime units with specialized support like providing snipers to assist with regime military operations. But by 2012, when the regime began losing control over parts of Syria, LH began to take on a direct combat role.¹⁸⁰ A battle in early 2012 in Zabadani near the Lebanese border saw LH deployed and engaged with rebel forces along this historical supply route from Baalbek to Damascus.¹⁸¹ In February 2013, LH fighters launched a ground offensive against rebel forces near al-Qusayr, with the FSA publicizing the fact of direct LH intervention in the fight.¹⁸²

In April 2013, both KH and AAH fought in the Damascus suburb of Sayyeda Zeinah, with these two groups actually publishing videos and photos on the internet to document their operations.¹⁸³

In addition to the employing LH, KH, and AAH, the IRGC-QF formed pro-regime militias, like the Jaysh al-Shaibi, that provided native irregular forces to fight on behalf of the regime.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁸² Ibid., 23.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 20.

Strength and Weaknesses

There are two key strengths to the Iranian use of LH and other surrogates in this conflict. First is the sheer size of the fighting force that the Iranians generated. Not including the LH, KH, and AAH fighting strength numbers, which were both formidable in size yet difficult to obtain, the IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari identified the Jaysh al-Shaibi Syrian irregular forces as numbering 50,000 fighters in September of 2012.¹⁸⁵ Such a force size actually exceeded the 40,000 force identified with the FSA during this same period.

The second strength to the Iranian use of LH and other surrogates is Iran's ability to generate or surge additional support as required. As described in the opening paragraph of this section, Iran employed advisors from its ground forces, intelligence, law enforcement, and special forces organizations. The Iranians also committed its surrogate force of Lebanese Hizballah. The IRGC-QF trained and deployed Shia militants from Iraq and formed parallel militant groups from Syrian irregular fighters. Iran could ratchet-up additional support as required, taking full advantage of geography as a regional power with ground and air supply lines through Iraq into Syria and Lebanon.

The major weakness of these activities would not manifest themselves in immediate military capabilities; rather, they would weaken the long-term strategic mystique or psychological value of LH. Long considered and billed as an Arab resistance force against Israel, LH demonstrated itself as a force that fought Syrian rebels attempting to overthrow their oppressive autocrat. Those Sunni rebels could and

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 19.

would be seen as the true resistance fighters, with the modern age LH emerging as a force that supported the repression of Sunni Arabs. This psychological shift is not yet fully manifested, but indeed it will emerge as a key weakness and vulnerability for LH in the future.

These Iranian-directed reinforcements to the Assad regime shifted the balance of forces away from the rebels and back towards the regime. But it took the arrival of the Russian forces and the further dissipation of rebels from the moderate factions to the extremists of ISIS and the al Nusrah forces to decisively tip the scales against the viable and acceptable resistance force.

The Counterargument: “Yes, the resistance did exist, but it was too fractured to be useful.” The Rebuttal: “Advise and Assist.”

A careful review of this chapter clearly shows that a variable and acceptable resistance did exist in Syria in the time period of 2011 to 2014. The maps, charts, photographs, and screen shots from video testimonies – all contemporaneous to this time period – demonstrates the existence of this force. Moreover, analysis from academics, other researchers, and think tanks – again during this same time period – document that this information was publically known.

At this point, the skeptic might now acknowledge that a viable and acceptable resistance did exist, but the critic would be quick to add that it was too fractured to be useful or not dominant within the rebel coalition that formed in 2012. Indeed, the nature of a grassroots uprising suggests there would be no

unified command and control structure to such an organization. The skeptic would also add that when the national-level political and military headquarters finally did appear, they were located well outside of Syria and they enjoyed little respect from the actual fighters in Syria.

I acknowledge the above points. But I add that having a diffused leadership structure is actually advantageous for an emerging resistance organization. Had there been one unified headquarters, leader, or command post, it would have been catastrophic for the resistance if the regime identified and raided that location. By contrast, a diffused leadership structure, like a multi-headed hydra, would be able to absorb the loss of any one particular headquarters, leader, or command post. That said, ultimately the resistance would need to unify itself, express one clear political vision for the future, and provide strategic guidance and direction for all of the resistance, but in 2011-2012 that was neither necessary nor desirable. This chapter also showed that the resistance was subsequently on track with the political SOC and its subordinate military SMC to achieve these political objectives of a unified vision. I would also add that with the formation of the SMC, Western supporters now had a central node to funnel support into the resistance, and such channelized support is also a useful means to align the activities of individual resistance units towards common goals and objectives.

Although the SMC could perform the above function at the strategic level, once weapons and supplies got into Syria, the function of further infiltrating and disseminating these supplies to the right units in the proper amounts needed to

be supervised and executed by a reliable infrastructure within Syria. Here diffused distribution networks would not be advantageous. But this is precisely the role that Western or other competent military advisors could have performed. To be sure, this is not a conventional military activity to advise and assist rebels behind enemy lines, but it is the classic doctrinal mission of US Army Special Forces units.

It is interesting to highlight a relevant historical case study that demonstrates the utility and effectiveness of an advise and assist mission in a denied area behind enemy lines.¹⁸⁶ Prior to the Allied invasion of France in World War II, British, Free French, and American “Jedburgh” teams parachuted into France. These teams made contact with existing Free French resistance fighters hundreds of miles behind German lines and trained, armed, advised, and assisted these local resistance fighters in guerrilla warfare and sabotage actions against German forces. There were less than one hundred Jedburgh teams (three members in each team), which included eighty-three Americans.¹⁸⁷ Their battlefield successes are well known to military historians, but the Jedburghs also achieved success in organizing and orchestrating the various resistance bands to have a common strategic and political vision, united behind French General Charles de Gaulle, with sequenced combat activities in support of the larger strategic campaign. Without the Jedburghs, it is doubtful that the French resistance would have organized into anything more effective than local and

¹⁸⁶ This case study comes from Will Irwin, *The Jedburghs: The Secret History of the Allied Special Force, France 1944* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., xvii and xxii

disparate raiding bands. Researcher Will Irwin, in a remarkable case study of the Jedburghs, succinctly stated:

An often unrecognized contribution of the Jedburghs was their ability to keep marquis groups of wide-ranging political and ideological backgrounds focused on working together to defeat the common enemy – the Germans. More than a few Jedburgh veterans have told me that they expended as much effort in preventing clashes between rival marquis groups as they did in fighting the Germans.”¹⁸⁸

After reviewing the maps, charts, and photos of the Syrian resistance in this chapter, one might wonder about how a small element of modern day Jedburghs would have enabled the resistance to more effectively fight the Assad regime and the Iranian surrogates, while keeping the emerging ISIS organization at bay.

A viable and acceptable resistance force did exist, and an US military advise and assist effort could have enabled their effectiveness by organizing, training, equipping, and arming these proper resistance elements within Syria.

Synthesis: The Missed Windows of Opportunity

This chapter reveals that not only did a viable and acceptable resistance exist during this period, but also, as time went on over this three-year period, other factors and players emerged that impacted the military conditions on the ground. Clearly, the rise of the Sunni extremists and the increasing Iranian involvement complicated the calculus for when and how best to support to resistance.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 236.

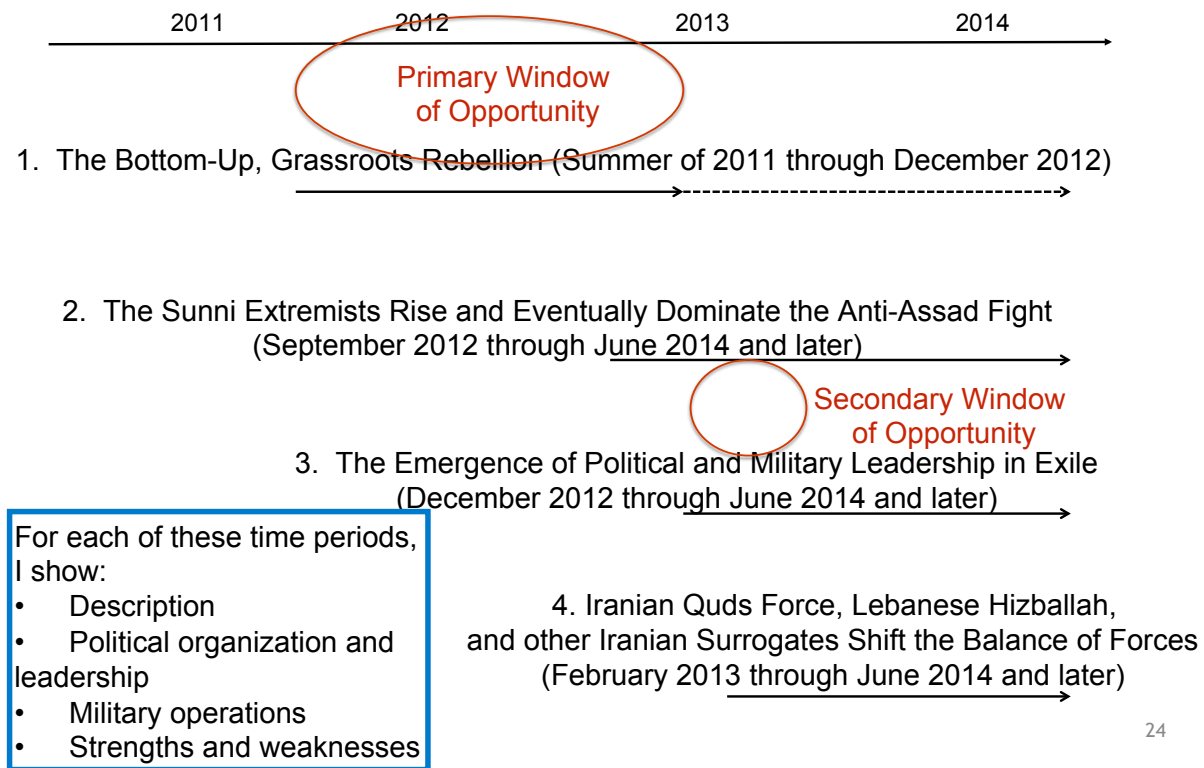


Figure 32: Windows of Opportunity to Support the Resistance

Given these conditions, when would have been the best period or periods to support the resistance? The analysis of the four time periods addressed in this chapter suggest that the primary window of opportunity would have been between the summer of 2011 through December 2012. (See Figure 32) During the window, the resistance was bottom-up and grassroots in nature. Similar to the Jedburgh experience described above, small Special Forces elements could have made direct contact with several of the various fighting units, assessed their capabilities and intentions against the litmus text of “viable and acceptable”, and supported the proper resistance units accordingly. Moreover, of significance, during this time neither the Islamist extremists nor the Iranians had established

powerful forces; the balance of power shifted from the regime forces to the FSA. A second window of opportunity existed with the establishment of the SOC and SMC in December 2012 and extended until roughly the summer of 2013. By the time this six-month window closed, the Sunni extremists, the Iranians, and the Iranian surrogates had established sufficient strength to shift the balance of power away from the FSA and the SMC. Supporting the latter was still viable, but became much more difficult with these shifting conditions and force ratios. All this said, the best way to judge and assess these actual windows of opportunity would have been to dispatch contact or assessment teams to the resistance forces to determine a ground-truth assessment. However, it is clear that these windows of opportunity did exist and no US military action was taken to assess the resistance force units' viability and acceptability.

Chapter Summary

This chapter showed that a viable and acceptable Syrian resistance element did exist in the March 2011 to June 2014 time period. The chapter detailed the pre-Arab Spring political, economic, and social underpinnings to the rebellion, as well as the regional context and spark of the Arab Spring. The chapter detailed a concise yet thorough description of the Syrian resistance of 2011-2014 using sources and information contemporaneous to this period.

In this chapter I also addressed the counterargument that the resistance was too fractured to be useful by providing the rebuttal that a diffused command and control element is actually desirable in this stage of resistance development

and that an advisory and assistance effort would have enabled both the development of more effective combat capabilities and a more unified chain of command at a more appropriate time. I concluded this chapter with an assessment of a primary and secondary window of opportunity for supporting the resistance that the US ignored.

As will be shown in the following chapter, the conventional US military, perhaps looking for a well organized conventional military force vice a resistance movement, failed to see, recognize, and understand the significance of this resistance. Perhaps too the conventional intelligence establishment was oblivious to or prejudiced against the manifestation of the resistance via social media, YouTube videos, and real-time Skype interviews vice conventional intelligence collection. Perhaps both deficiencies together conspired to form glaucoma against what should have been seen and understood.

Regardless, no serious US military planning or effort occurred to assess or support the resistance during this period. This void subsequently became filled with Iranian, LH, and other Iranian surrogates – and later Russian military intervention – that tipped the balance against the resistance. Why and how this US military failure occurred is the subject of the upcoming chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR:
WHY AND HOW DID THE US MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRAIN, ADVISE,
AND EQUIP THE SYRIAN RESISTANCE?

“A broad study of special operations seems to indicate a trained incapacity, a *deformation professionnelle*, on the part of conventional military minds to grasp the principles of special warfare.... A civilian generally will have difficulty grasping just how alien and even distasteful special operations often appear to those trained and socialized in regular military behavior. This point is important because if superior commanders do not appreciate or do not like what special operations forces might do, the strategic utility of those forces will be strictly moot. In many cases the strategic utility of special operations rests in the hands of military officers who have attitudes, interests, and an understanding of war unfriendly to the potential of special warfare.”¹⁸⁹

--Colin S. Gray, British-American strategic theorist and defense analyst.

“Culture, psychology, and decision-making structure place limits on the development, delivery, and impact of effective military voice in national security policy discussions.”¹⁹⁰

--Retired U.S. Army Major General William E. Rapp, former Commandant of the U.S. Army War College

¹⁸⁹ Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 150-151.

¹⁹⁰ William E. Rapp, Major General, “Toward Strategic Solvency: Ensuring Effective Military Voice,” *Parameters: The US Army War College Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 4, Winter 2016-2017, 13.

This chapter is the heart of the dissertation. Once it is clear that a viable and acceptable resistance did exist in Syria in the March 2011 to June 2014 period, as the previous chapter explained, one can reasonably expect answers as to why and how the US missed the opportunity to train, advise, and equip these resistance elements.

In this chapter I first review some elements of the research methodology described in chapter one that provide the framework for the analysis in this chapter. I will then transition to the following major sections of this chapter:

- The Evolving US Policy and Strategy
- Process-Tracing the Key National Security Decision-Making
- The Conceptual Framework Applied to the How and Why Questions
- How Did the US Make this Decision?
- Why Did the US Make this Decision?

The dissertation is a qualitative methods single case study with using process-tracing as described by Alexander L. George, Andrew Bennett, and Jeffrey T.

Checkel.¹⁹¹ Primary source evidence included Congressional testimonies and memoirs from the key participants in the decision-making plus senior-level interviews. This research also included reviewing and harvesting dozens of US government policy statements that both reacted to and attempted to influence events in Syria. It was very important to place those information pieces onto a timeline and to then look for the

¹⁹¹ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005). See also Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge, UK: University Printing House, 2015).

relationships between the events that either influenced or reflected the US decision-making.

To answer the “how and why” the US made this decision, I based the analysis on Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory as the conceptual framework. Luhmann’s analysis of as to how systems or organizations deal with complexity, and specifically how they tend to deflect or dismiss developments or ideas that do not fit their established paths of similar decision-making, is remarkable for its similarity to the Syrian situation and how the US military assessed or failed to properly assess this complex situation. To answer the “how” portion I used this systems theory and the more simplistic structural-functionalism theory approach to examine the military decision-making process for providing inputs to the National Security Council. This approach revealed the inherent flaws for developing military support to resistance activities by marginalizing unconventional warfare experts from the key operational positions in the decision-making. To answer the “why” portion, I showed that the conventional senior military leaders, in accordance with Luhmann’s theory, are prone to see and react to developments in their environments that make sense only from their autopoiesis-based frame of reference. The military leaders – intelligence, operations, and planners – showed no ability to generate an unconventional response to complex unconventional situation unfolding in Syria, as this chapter will show.

In both of these cases – the how and the why – the analysis is fully congruent not only with Luhmann’s system theory but also with Alex Mintz’ Integrated Cognitive and Rationale Theory of Foreign Policy Decision-Making, as described in chapter one. Moreover, the “how” portion is consistent with classic structural-functionalism and the

“why” portion is consistent with institutional (or bureaucracy) culture theory, which would suggest that conventional military officers would offer conventional military solutions.

Examining the analysis, writings, and decision-making inputs from the key national security participants was essential. These leaders included the President, Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US Ambassador to Syria and lower ranking but key persons privy to the decision-making. In addition to the background research of this data, I interviewed the US Ambassador to Syria at the time, Robert Ford, and retired Lieutenant General Charles Cleveland, who was the most senior Special Forces (Green Beret) commander in the US during this period. Ambassador Ford’s insights to the US decision-making were key and essential, while General Cleveland’s decades-long observations on the cultural conflict between conventional and unconventional military forces was equally significant to the causal analysis of the research question.

Given the data above, I constructed both macro-level process-trace charts that highlighted important events on one timeline, and then I distilled seven key decision-making events into micro-level process-trace charts that dissected the decision-making by showing who made what input, when, how, and why. It is important that readers familiarize themselves with the macro-level process-trace charts in Appendix A before proceeding in this chapter.

But first, to set the context of the decision-making, a review of the evolution of the US policy during this period is essential.

The Evolving US Policy and Strategy

From 2011 to 2014 – and indeed beyond this time as well – US policy evolved in reaction to and with the aim of influencing events on the ground. What began as public expressions of support to the viable and acceptable resistance elements, coupled with the provision of non-lethal assistance to activist networks within Syria, evolved through calls for Assad’s removal from power, the establishment of “red lines” over regime use of chemical weapons, the disregard of violations of that red line, an apparent limited provision of weapons to the resistance, to a somewhat passive US response to the military interventions from Iran, Lebanese Hizballah, and Russia. Only after Mosul’s fall to ISIS in June 2014, which marks the end of the time period focus for this dissertation, did the US president decide to provide military support to the Syrian resistance, albeit in the form of a train-and-equip program vice MSRA/UW.

Appendix A provides the macro-level process-tracing charts and data in a mosaic depiction of this evolving picture. The first section of the appendix shows the activities on an integrated timeline organizing the events by actions taken by Syrian elements (e.g., regime, resistance forces, ISIS), other regional actors and international organizations (e.g., Iran and the United Nations), and the US government. The second section of the appendix provides the detailed public statements issued by the US government during this period.

Beginning with a press statement on July 5, 2011, the US government urged the Assad regime to stop its repression against the protests that blossomed in the opening months of the Arab Spring. The statement expressed support for a transition to

democracy and stated that the US would stand with the people of Syria in seeking their human rights.¹⁹²

On February 24, 2012 the first meeting of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People, an organization of more than sixty countries with representatives from the United Nations, the European Union, and the Arab League, met in Tunis to discuss the Syrian situation. In a joint statement, the participants strongly condemned the Assad regime and called for a political transition to a democratic, plural political system. The statement also specified that Assad would need to delegate his full authority to his First Deputy during the transition period. The Friends Group also expressed disappointment at the UN Security Council's inability to produce similar statements due to Russian and Chinese opposition. The Friends Group also recognized the Syrian National Council as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people and called for increased support to the Syrian opposition.¹⁹³

In February 2013, the US government would back these calls for a political transition to a democratic and pluralist system of government with significant material support. In an official statement, the State Department noted that over seventy thousand Syrians had been killed in the previous two years of political unrest and that the regime had "sacrificed all legitimacy in a vicious effort to cling to power."¹⁹⁴ The statement specified that the US government had provided nearly \$385 million in

¹⁹² Victoria Nuland, Department of State, Washington, DC, July 5, 2011, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/07/167577.htm>.

¹⁹³ Office of the Spokesperson, Department of State, Washington, DC, February 24, 2012, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/02/184642.htm>.

¹⁹⁴ Office of the Spokesperson, Department of State, Washington, DC, February 22, 2013, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/02/205092.htm>.

humanitarian assistance and over \$54 million in non-lethal support for local opposition councils and civil society inside Syria.¹⁹⁵ Of significance, this support to the opposition included “training and equipment to build the capacity of a nation-wide network of ethnically and religiously diverse civilian activists to link Syrian citizens with nascent government structures.”¹⁹⁶ This support was also intended to enhance the information security of Syrian activists, human rights organizations, and media outlets.”¹⁹⁷

Within two months Secretary of State John Kerry announced the doubling of this non-lethal support to the opposition to \$123 million, specifically mentioning the resistance force’s Supreme Military Council (SMC) as the recipient of some of this support.¹⁹⁸ The total for non-lethal support to the resistance was now pledged at \$250 million.¹⁹⁹

In April 2013 Elizabeth Jones, the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, summarized US policy and strategy during testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. She reiterated US policy for a political transition in Syria that removes Assad and assures that Assad has no role during the political transition. She stated, “Assad has long lost his legitimacy...(he) will not play any role in that transitional governing body.”²⁰⁰ She added, “We are preparing for a Syria without Assad by helping the opposition lay the foundation for a democratic transition.... (We) and our partners are helping build the Syrian political opposition, including by

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Office of the Spokesperson, Department of State, Washington, DC, April 20, 2013, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/04/207810.htm>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ *US Policy Toward Syria*. Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. 113th Congress, April 11, 2013, 6.

recognizing the Syrian Opposition Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.”²⁰¹

Jones highlighted the international coalition that was backing this political goal. In her statement she referred to the Geneva communiqué and its framework for the political transition that was agreed to in June 2012 by the members of the UN Security Council, Turkey, and the Arab League.²⁰² In this testimony she added that the United States did not believe it to be in its best interests to provide lethal support to the Syrian opposition at this time.²⁰³

At this same hearing, the US Ambassador to Syria, Robert S. Ford, in response to a question to list the key strategic objectives for the US in Syria, replied that the US goals consisted of ensuring Syria’s chemical weapons do not fall into the hands of terrorist groups, Syria does not become a base for terrorist operations, Syria becomes a source of stability in the region (more specifically, ensuring the refugee flow does not destabilize the region), and a political transition occurs that removes Assad from regime from power and transitions the government to a democratic and pluralistic form.²⁰⁴

Ambassador Ford continued, “The groups that we are supporting, Senator, are talking about a vision of a country and a vision of a state that is inclusive and that will treat citizens equally regardless of their religion or their ethnicity. And that is the best opportunity we have to isolate extremists. I do not think it will be easy to isolate those extremists, Senator, but I think there is an opportunity to contain the sectarian divisions

²⁰¹ Ibid., 5.

²⁰² Ibid., 8.

²⁰³ Ibid., 6.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 22.

with the kind of outreach that I mentioned from both the political opposition as well as the Syrian Supreme Military Command.”²⁰⁵

Six months later, testifying to the same committee, Ambassador Ford, added to this policy description by stating the transition governing body would be established by mutual agreement between the Syrian regime and the opposition. He stated, “Mutual consent would mean the opposition has a veto on the formation and the details of that transition government.... That said, the regime also has a veto.”²⁰⁶ Ambassador Ford underscored the fact that the USG had already identified and was working with the moderate armed opposition when he stated, “Our nonlethal support of a moderate armed opposition is therefore vital and is a point that General Idris of the Supreme Military Council has made to me repeatedly.”²⁰⁷

On August 21, 2013 chemical weapons were used on protestors near Damascus resulting in the deaths of 1,429 people; on August 30, the US formally attributed to attack to the Syrian regime.²⁰⁸

President Obama on September 7, 2013 called for limited military actions to “hold the Assad regime accountable for its violation of international norms prohibiting the use

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Robert S. Ford. *Opening Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, Washington, DC, October 31, 2013, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/216163.htm>.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Government Assessment of the Syrian Government’s Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013”, August 30, 2013, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/30/government-assessment-syrian-government-s-use-chemical-weapons-august-21>.

of chemical weapons.”²⁰⁹ He asked Congress to vote to authorize this use of force; a vote that never occurred.

Four months later the State Department announced that the USG was now providing nearly \$260 million in direct support to the moderate Syrian opposition. This January 17, 2014 statement specifically mentioned the “Supreme Military Council (SMC) of the Free Syria Army” and detailed the assistance as including support to local councils to create linkages among opposition groups, and strengthen grassroots organizations and local administrative bodies. This statement specified that training and equipment would go towards a network of “over 2,000 grassroots activists...from more than 100 opposition councils and organizations” within Syria. The stated purpose of this support was to enhance “the linkages between Syrian activists, human rights organizations, and independent media outlets...(and) training for networks of citizen journalists, bloggers, and cyber activists.” This statement also detailed the provision of vehicles, tons of medical equipment, satellite access equipment, laptops, and radio communication equipment to the Supreme Military Council.²¹⁰ It is striking to note that during the years of 2012-2014, the US military would excuse its lack of developing MSRA/UW options on the “fact” that no one could identify an opposition in sufficient detail or organization to properly support.

²⁰⁹ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Weekly Address: Calling for Limited Military Action in Syria,” September 7, 2013, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/07/weekly-address-calling-limited-military-action-syria>.

²¹⁰ Office of the Spokesperson, Department of State, Washington, DC, January 17, 2014, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/01/220029.htm>.

With this brief overview of the evolving US policy and strategy as background, acknowledging that more details can be found in Appendix A, I now turn to process-tracing the key decision-making events.

Process-Tracing the Key National Security Decision-Making

Before presenting the analysis as to how and why this decision-making occurred, it is necessary to clearly describe the decision-making events themselves. In this dissertation, I used Alexander George and Andrew Bennett's technique of process-tracing, which they define and describe as a method "to identify the intervening causal process—the causal chain and causal mechanism—between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable."²¹¹ George and Bennett describe several varieties of this technique, each rooted in detailed descriptions or narratives of the events, but each using theories in varying degrees.²¹²

In my application of process-tracing in this dissertation, I first recorded the important political, military, social, and economic events occurring within the context of the Syrian rebellion of March 2011 to June 2014, to include those related events occurring prior to and after this period. I then categorized and arranged over one hundred of those events not only by date but also of events by Syrian actors (Assad regime, resistance elements) and ISIS, actions by other states (minus the US) and international organizations, and actions by the US government to include internal decision-making events. This categorization and arrangement of these events more

²¹¹ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 206.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 210-232.

clearly show the constructivist-like relationships between some of these events. This thirty-plus page chart is captured in Appendix A to this dissertation. The reader should review that appendix before proceeding to the next section of this chapter.

Appendix A is divided into two sections: the first is the chart of the events and the second contains the detailed and exact policy statements from the White House and State Department that are associated with the policy pronouncement events of the process-tracing chart. Having these exact words is essential to chart the decision-making process.

Next, from within this chart I identified and extracted seven key US government decision-making events, which are highlighted in blue ink in the appendix. These key events require a further deep analysis to examine their contribution to and illumination of the US government decision-making. These events are:

1. Senior US defense and military leaders assess that “it is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition” (February and March 2012).
2. Interagency senior leaders express frustration at DoD’s thinking (mid-2012).
3. President Obama rejects National Security Council recommendation for the CIA to arm the rebels (September 2012).
4. Significant divergence apparent between DoD senior leaders and the US Ambassador in Syria on assessing the resistance (April 2013).
5. Two months later President Obama approves plan for CIA to arm the resistance (June 2013).

6. In the wake of the fall of Mosul, President Obama orders the military to train and equip the resistance in their fight against ISIS, but not the Assad regime (June 2014).
7. Congress approves the funding for the DoD train and equip operation (December 2014).

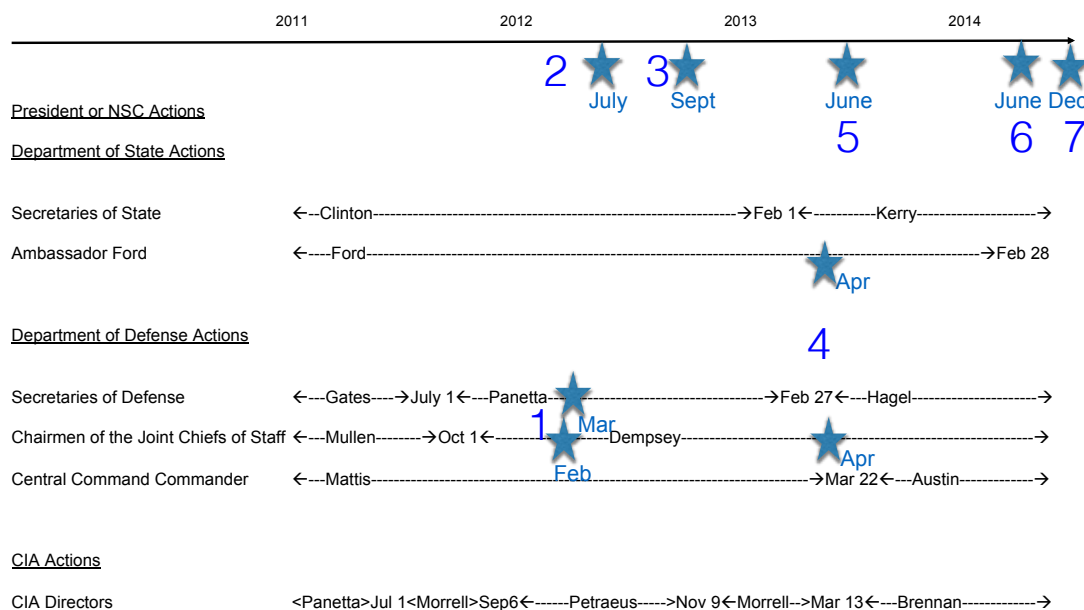


Figure 33: Overview of Process Tracing the Decision-Making (Micro-View)

I next arrayed these seven events on a synchronization matrix that shows their relationship to each other over time and by principal actor. (See Figure 33 above.) The principal actors are shown as the President, the Secretary of State, the US Ambassador to Syria, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (the highest

uniformed member in the US military and the principal military advisor to the President), the Commander of the US Central Command (the military command with operational responsibility for the geographic area in the middle east and south-central Asia that includes Syria), and the Director of the CIA. Since the actual people that held these positions varied over this three-year period from March 2011 to June 2014, with the exception of the president, the individuals' names are listed on the chart with a timeline.

In other words, the charts dissect the decision-making in these seven events by capturing which senior national security leader said what, where, when, why, and how. What follows is an examination of each of these seven key events.

Event One: Senior US Defense and Military Leaders Assess that “It is Not Clear What Constitutes the Syrian Armed Opposition” (February and March 2012)

The first key event occurred in February and March of 2012 when the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, and the Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, made separate statements to separate audiences that there was no identifiable armed opposition in Syria. (See Figure 34) In an interview with *CNN's* Fareed Zakaria that aired on February 19, 2012, General Dempsey stated "I think it's premature to take a decision to arm the opposition movement in Syria, because I would challenge anyone to clearly identify for me the opposition movement in Syria at this point."²¹³ The Chairman would continue to echo this sentiment for the next two years, much to the resulting frustration of US Ambassador to Syria, the Secretary of State, and eventually even Leon Panetta. But at this time, Secretary of Defense Panetta was in

²¹³ "U.S. Military Chief Dubious About Arming Syrian Rebels," *CNN*, accessed February 4, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/19/us/syria/>.

lockstep with the General Dempsey as they testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee March 7, 2012.

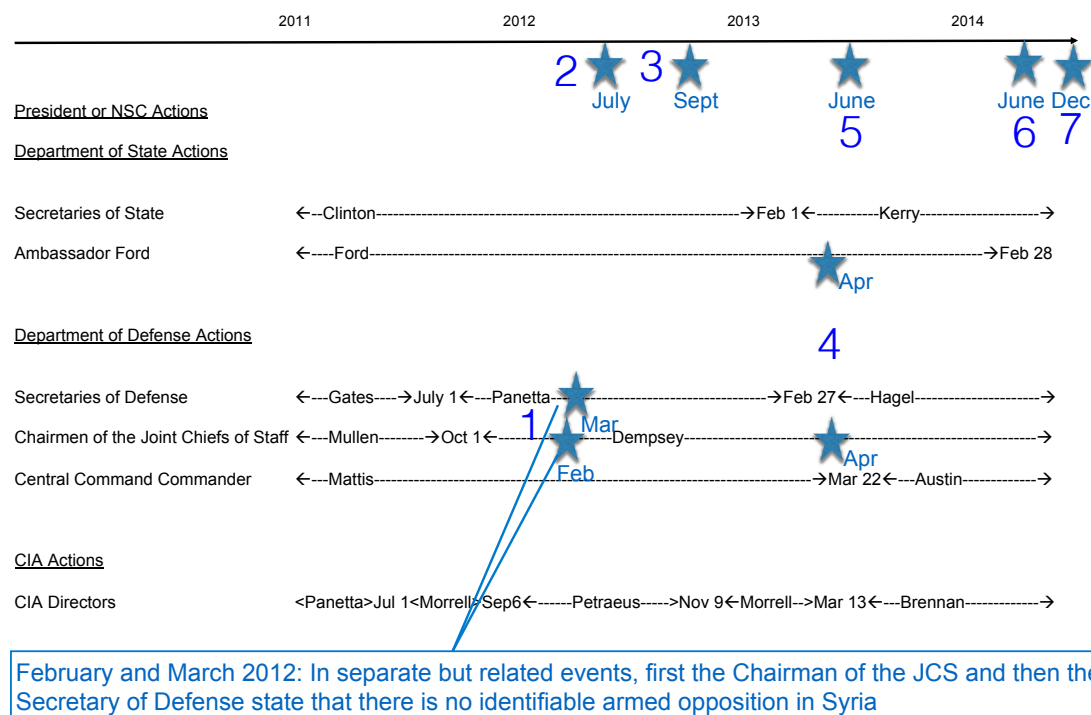


Figure 34: Senior US Defense and Military Leaders Assess That “it is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition” (February and March 2012)

Panetta testified, “It is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition. There has been no single unifying military alternative that can be recognized, appointed, or contacted” Panetta testified.²¹⁴

General Dempsey added that there are “...approximately one hundred groups that we’ve identified as part of the opposition....(but) some kind of coherent core...it doesn’t exist today.”²¹⁵

²¹⁴ *The Situation in Syria, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate, 100th Congress, 2nd session (March 7, 2012), accessed September 23, 2014, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsy/pkg/CHRG-112shrg76271/html/CHRG-112shrg7621.htm>.*

It is important to view this military testimony in March of 2012 and its contrasting assessment to what Jeffrey D. Feltman, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, testified to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs just four months prior on November 9, 2011. The assistant secretary testified that armed resistance to the regime was increasing, and that:

“One of the more promising recent developments is the establishment of the Syrian National Council (SNC), a coalition including secularists, Christians, Islamists, Druze, Alawis, Kurds, and other groups from both inside and outside of Syria who have joined together to form a united front against the Assad regime.... We continue to meet regularly with members of the opposition, including, but not exclusively, many SNC members.”²¹⁶

Returning to General Dempsey’s testimony on March 7, 2012, a heated exchange developed between the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on one side and Senator John McCain on the other, when Panetta stated, “It is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition.”²¹⁷ With General Dempsey at Secretary Panetta’s side, Senator McCain responded, “General Dempsey, again I hear the same old refrain that I’ve heard for many, many years: ‘It’s not clear what constitutes

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ *U.S. Policy on Syria*, written statement from Jeffrey D. Feltman, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Near Eastern Affairs and South and Central Asian Affairs, November 9, 2011, accessed February 7, 2017, http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Jeffrey_Feltman_Revised.pdf.

²¹⁷ *The Situation in Syria, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate*, 100th Congress, 2nd session (March 7, 2012), accessed September 23, 2014, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsy/pkg/CHRG-112shrg76271/html/CHRG-112shrg7621.htm>.

the Syrian armed opposition.’ That was the same argument that this administration used for not intervening in Libya at the beginning.”²¹⁸

Senator McCain continued, “We can find out who they are. They’re not fighting and dying because they’re al Qaeda. They’re not fighting and dying and sacrificing their lives because they’re Muslim extremists. They’re fighting and dying because they want the same universal rights and freedom that we are guaranteed in our Constitution. So I reject the argument that we ‘don’t know who they are’.... We should know who these people are and it would be easy enough to find out. The best way, of course, to help them organize is to provide them with a safe haven where they can organize and train and equip.”²¹⁹ (Of note, in a highly publicized move in May 2013 Senator McCain himself would cross into Syria from Turkey to meet with rebel commanders.)

In trying to rectify the apparent conflicting comments coming from the Departments of Defense and State leaders, the reader may focus on the words “armed opposition” rather than the political opposition that Feltman referred. While this is a valid distinction, it seems inconceivable that at least some of the political opposition leaders inside Syria would not know at least some of the armed resistance leaders.

What General Dempsey was failing to appreciate about MSRM/UW – and what Senator McCain actually did – is that given information gaps of “exactly who are these people” with their “lack of organization”, the best course of action may be to dispatch a small team to make contact with those resistance leaders, assess their capabilities and intentions, and if so warranted, to assist them in organizing into a more coherent resistance. This was not only the approach that the Department of State was pursuing

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

with the political opposition leaders, but this is exactly the approach that General Joseph Votel, a recent commander of US Special Operations Command, described in his article *Unconventional Warfare in the Grey Zone*. General Votel described the World War II era example of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Jedburgh teams who parachuted into German-occupied France to assist in organizing, arming, and advising the French resistance.

“Many Jedburgh veterans later testified that they spent much of their time preventing the various resistance factions—each with different postwar political agendas and often violently opposed to one another—from fighting each other and keeping them focused on the common enemy, the German occupiers.”²²⁰

General Votel continued, “One need look no further than Syria today to imagine how much more difficult the Allied ground campaign to liberate France might have been had this internecine rivalry not been held in check. With all of their tactical and operational successes, the Jedburgh’s greatest strategic contribution might have been in keeping the tenuous French Forces of the Interior coalition intact.”²²¹

Although General Votel’s advice and counsel cited above would occur four years after General Dempsey’s testimony, Will Irwin, a co-author with General Votel, published a 2005 book documenting the history and operational use of the Jedburgh

²²⁰ Joseph L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin, “Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 80, (1st Quarter 2016): 106. In this paragraph, the authors cite Will Irwin’s previous work *The Secret History of the Allied Special Forces, France 1944* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 236.

²²¹ Ibid.

teams. In that text he described the Jedburgh's role in unifying the various resistance elements by making contact with them and embedding as advisors.²²²

Event Two: Interagency Senior Leaders Express Frustration at DoD's Thinking (mid-2012)

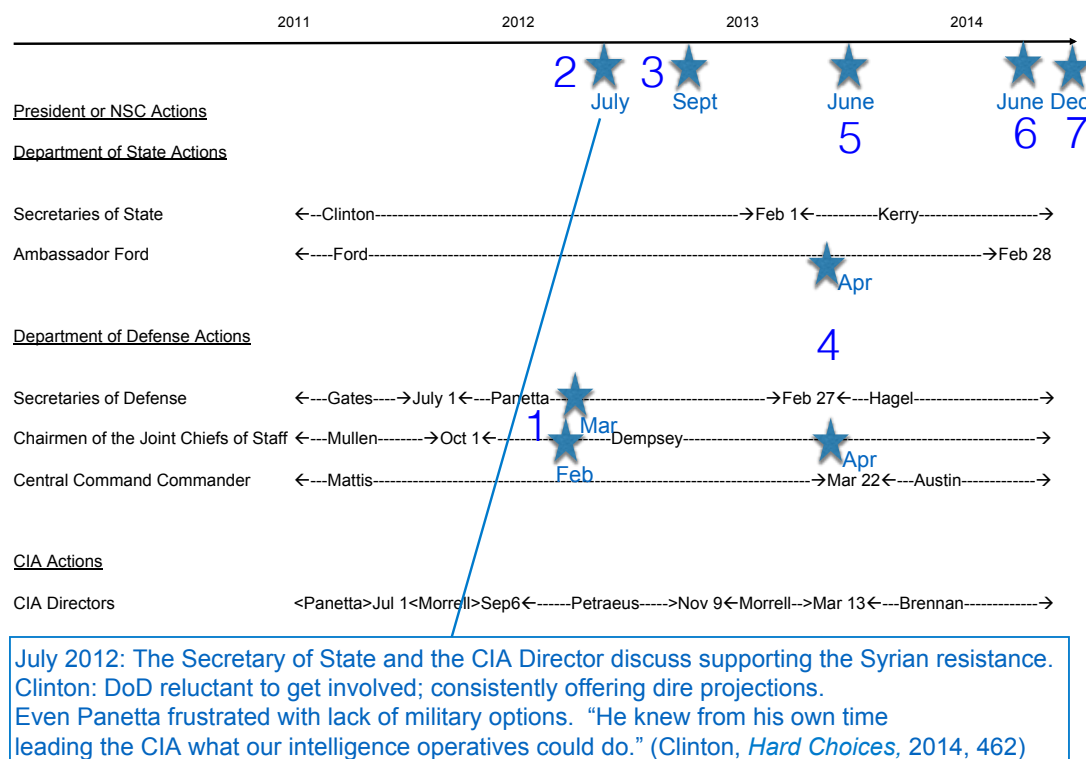


Figure 35: Interagency Senior Leaders Express Frustration at DoD's Thinking (July 2012)

The second event involved interagency senior leaders – including Secretary of Defense Panetta – expressing frustration at DoD's conventional thinking. As Figure 35

²²² Will Irwin. *The Jedburghs: The Secret History of the Allied Special Forces, France 1944* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 236, based on correspondence and interviews with more than sixty US, British, and French Jedburgh veterans from 1985 to 2005.

shows above, in July 2012 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and CIA Director David Petraeus discussed supporting the Syrian resistance with weapons. As Clinton writes in her memoirs, DoD was reluctant to get involved and consistently offered dire projections. She added that even Leon Panetta – then the Secretary of Defense – was frustrated with the lack of military options coming from his generals. “He knew from his own time leading the CIA what our intelligence operatives could do.”²²³

Here not only do we see frustration within the elite levels of the National Security Council (the Secretaries of Defense and State, plus the Director of the CIA), but we see frustration at the very top of the Department of Defense with the assessments and options being presented by the conventional generals.

Event Three: President Obama Rejects National Security Council

Recommendation for the CIA to Arm the Rebels (September 2012)

According to Clinton, this frustration would lead to CIA Director Petraeus to not wait for the military and instead independently recommend a proposal to the president for the CIA to arm and assist the Syrian resistance. This is the third key event in this decision-making, which occurred in September 2012. Petraeus’ proposal was supported by both the Department of State and the Department of Defense; however, as Clinton later described the event, the president was “worried that arming the rebels was not likely to be enough to drive Assad from power.... unintended consequences to consider.”²²⁴ (See Figure 36)

²²³ Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 462.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 463

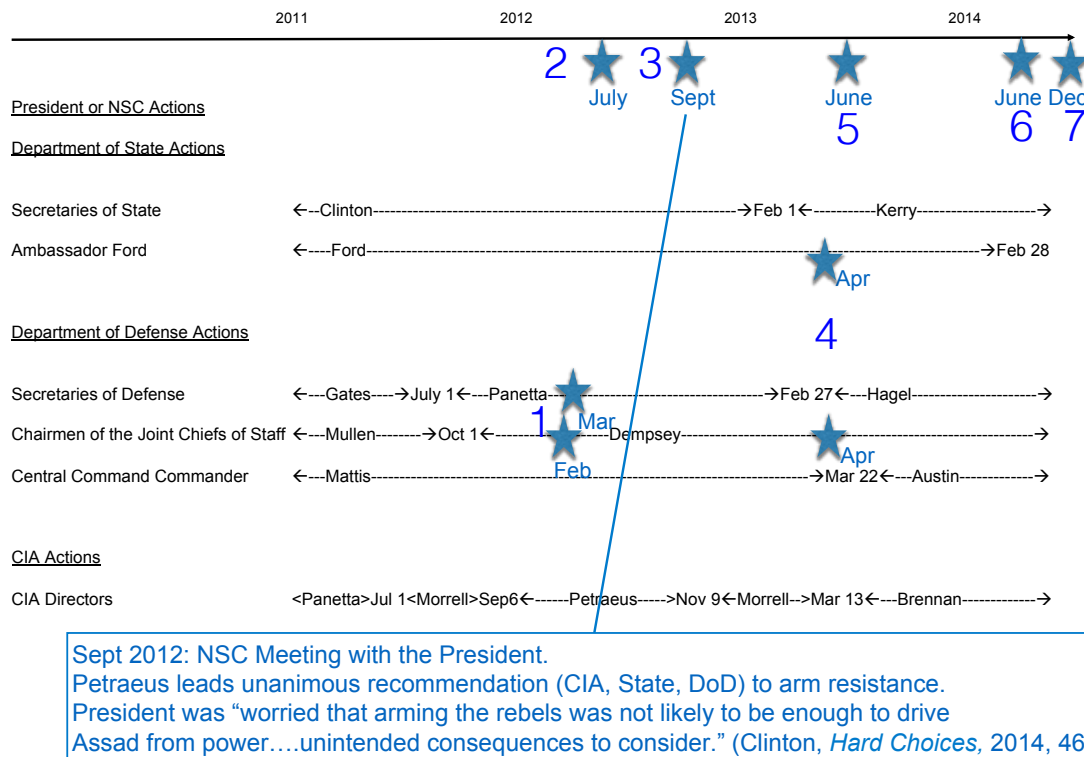


Figure 36: President Obama Rejects National Security Council Recommendation for CIA to Arm the Rebels (Sept 2012)

While this may seem prudent to the casual observer, it really suggests that the planners either did not present a comprehensive and coherent campaign plan, which would link individual tactical actions to a holistic approach with strategic objectives – in this case to topple the Assad regime – or that the president simply did not agree with either that assessment or projected outcome. What we do know, according to Clinton in her memoirs, is that the president did reject such a course of action from the CIA and the senior interagency leaders at this time. He would reverse his own decision, however, by the following year after the Assad regime used chemical weapons against his own people.

It is also important to note the timing of this decision, which occurred within two months of the presidential elections of 2012. One could reasonably argue that President Obama, who campaigned in 2008 in large part with themes of no more wars and bring the troops home, would not support any re-insertion of US troops into the Middle East, especially during the run-up to the election. After all, President Obama did withdraw all combat troops from Iraq by December 2011, as he promised in his 2008 election campaign. But there is a distinction between overtly committing US troops to a combat role and authorizing a presumably secret CIA activity. However, that could arguably be a distinction without a difference, given the backdrop of the upcoming election. As mentioned above, the president would reverse this decision nine months later in June 2013, after the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against its own people – and seven months after he won re-election.

Did the backdrop of the 2012 election affect the military's thinking? Certainly given the president's campaign rhetoric and his action of withdrawing US troops from Iraq, it would appear unlikely that the military would recommend any re-insertion of conventional US troops absent any significant threat to US national security interests. At the same time, however, it is important to note the increasing role of the State Department in addressing the Syrian situation in 2012, which included orchestrating a coalition to condemn the Assad regime and call for his removal, recognizing the Syrian National Council as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people, and increasing humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. During this 2012 election campaign season, while the State Department increased its efforts in Syria, there was no supporting US military involvement and no serious consideration for unconventional warfare.

Event Four: Significant Divergence Apparent Between DoD Senior Leaders and the US Ambassador in Syria on Assessing the Resistance (April 2013)

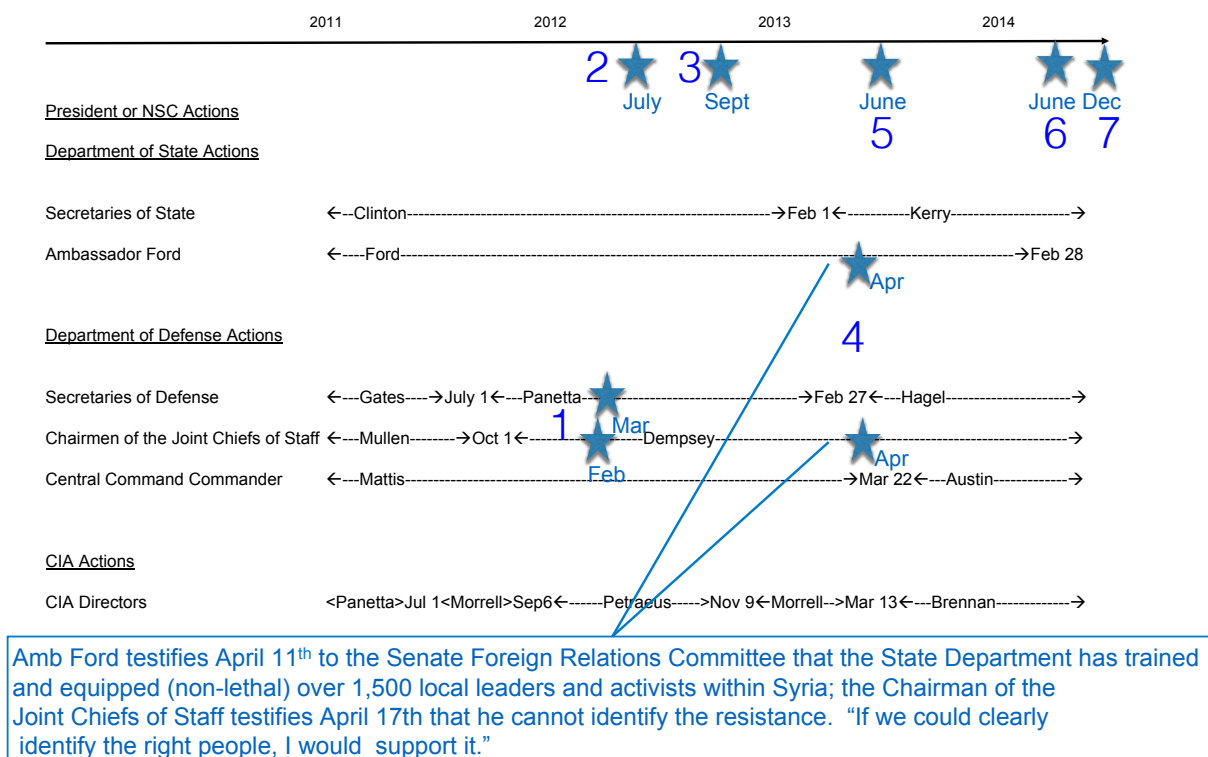


Figure 37: Significant Divergence Apparent Between DoD Senior Leaders and the US Ambassador in Syria on Assessing the Resistance (April 2013)

As described above in Figure 37, the fourth event involved two separate testimonies to different Congressional committees which occurred within seven days of each other in April 2013 which demonstrated the significant disconnect between the US Ambassador to Syria – living in Damascus at this time – and the senior generals in Washington. On April 11, 2013 the US Ambassador to Syria, Robert S. Ford, testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Department of State, under his cognizance as the ambassador, trained and equipped over 1,500 local leaders and

activists inside Syria.²²⁵ To be sure, this training, advice, and equipment were all non-lethal, but any student of resistance movements knows that advice and assistance on organizing a resistance movement is essential to both non-violent and violent resistance activities.²²⁶

In describing and presenting this critical event, it is important to read the actual words from these senior leaders. Ambassador Ford testified:

Since December 2012, the United States, along with our international partners, has recognized the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC) as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. Comprised of diverse representatives inside and outside Syria free from the influence of violent extremists.²²⁷

We are providing \$117 million in non-lethal, transition assistance to the Coalition and a range of local councils and grassroots groups inside Syria to build a network of ethnically and religiously diverse civilian activist from the top down as well as the bottom up. These funds are strengthening local councils, civil society groups, unarmed political activists, and free media to improve governance, accountability, and service delivery at the subnational and national level.... The United States has supplied Syrian activists with thousands of pieces of communications gear.... We boosted private radio station signals, extending the reach of broadcast on FM stations, and funded media outlets....²²⁸

The United States also trained over 1,500 local leaders and activists...from over one hundred different provincial councils.²²⁹

²²⁵ In a subsequent interview with Ambassador Ford by the author, the ambassador added that this 1,500 number was a cumulative accounting of recipients of this training and not a current student roster. Moreover, some of this number could have been a recipient of more than one type of training event. Ambassador Robert S. Ford, former ambassador to Syria, in an interview with the author March 30, 2017.

²²⁶ Nathan Bos, ed., *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies*, 2nd ed. (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Special Operations Command, 2013), 35-36, 290-293.

²²⁷ *US Policy Toward Syria*. Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. 113th Congress, April 11, 2013, 11.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

Of note, Ambassador Ford also spoke of the vetting of these leaders:²³⁰ “To mitigate the risk that our assistance might end up in the hands of extremists, we will continue to rely on the effective, formal processes that have been established across various agencies in the government to vet the recipients of US assistance.”²³¹

Thus, in this concise pronouncement of US diplomatic objectives for Syria in early 2013, one clearly sees significant levels of support (\$117 million) to an obviously identifiable network of activists. The network included leaders both inside and outside of Syria, over 1,500 local leaders and activists from over 100 different provincial councils, a military or armed component, and with a “formal (and) effective” interagency vetting process.

During this testimony Ambassador Ford mentioned that in the previous week, he had personally met with the commander of the opposition armed forces in the Aleppo region.²³² Such a statement would be in sharp contrast to the following week’s Congressional testimony from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

A significant divergence became apparent with conflicting assessments concerning the identification of these resistance elements between the Department of State and the Department of Defense. The April 2013 Department of State statements to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, cited above, were not congruent with the Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Martin

²³⁰ The following several paragraphs – through the exchange between Senator McCain and General Dempsey – are taken verbatim from the author’s previously published work, Paul S. Lieber, Richard Rubright, Tom Searle, Seth Leuthner, Will Irwin, and Konrad Trautman, *Syria Train and Equip: an Academic Study* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: JSOU Press, 2016).

²³¹ *US Policy Toward Syria*. Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, 113th Congress, April 11, 2013, 11.

²³² *Ibid.*, 9.

Dempsey's testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee just six days later. In that testimony General Dempsey, while acknowledging that State, Defense, and the CIA all supported the late-2012 CIA initiative to provide arms to the resistance (which President Obama disapproved), by implication General Dempsey acknowledged that the US government did identify supportable resistance elements in 2012. More incredulous, however, in this 2013 testimony the general then stated that he could no longer identify the proper elements within the resistance to support. The exchange with Senator McCain is illuminating:

Senator McCain: General Dempsey, when you and Secretary Panetta testified that both of you recommended the supply of weapons to the resistance, what led you to that conclusion and recommendation?

General Dempsey: At the time, the recommendation was based on – we felt like we had a clear enough understanding of the moderate opposition and we felt as though it was in the long term interest of Syria as a nation state, that the institutions would not fail. At that time, it was proper at that moment to intervene that way.

Senator McCain: Is it proper now to provide them with weapons?

General Dempsey: To tell you the truth, it is actually more confusing on the opposition side today than it was six months ago. There are more weapons in Syria.

Senator McCain: So if we had made the decision then to supply them with weapons, it would have been less complicated than now?

General Dempsey: That is a potential conclusion yes, sir.

Senator McCain: I do not know about potential. Let me get this straight. So now you think the situation is too complex to provide the resistance with weapons? Have you changed your recommendation?

General Dempsey: I have not been asked for a recommendation.

Senator McCain: I am asking for your opinion.

General Dempsey: My military judgment is that now that we have seen the emergence of al-Nusrah and Ahrar al-Sham notably and now that we have seen

photographs of some of the weapons that have been flowing into Syria in the hands of those groups, now I am more concerned than I was before.

Senator McCain: Does that mean you do not think we should supply the resistance with weapons, the right people?

General Dempsey: If we could clearly identify the right people, I would support it.²³³

Thus, in another heated exchange between Senator McCain and General Dempsey, this time over the revelation that the Chairman supported the previous year's recommendation from Petraeus to arm the resistance, but during this 2013 testimony General Dempsey was again saying he could no longer identify the proper resistance elements.

Contrast this testimony from General Dempsey with that provided by Ambassador Ford the previous week. Not only did Ambassador Ford detail the \$117 million in assistance to 1,500 activists, he stated that he had personally met with the commander of the armed opposition in the Aleppo region in the previous week.

Moreover, the following exchange between the ambassador and Senator Robert Menendez is striking:

Senator Menendez: How confident are we that we can differentiate between groups that espouse our values and those who do not within Syria?

Ambassador Ford: Mr. Chairman, we know a lot more about the armed opposition then we did six months ago or a year ago. It is dynamic. It is always evolving and new groups appear and there are mergers and others. But we do know a set of commanders, for example, the gentlemen that I met in Gaziantep on Tuesday, Colonel Abdel Jabar al-Akidey, who was reached out to Alawis. He has reached out to Christians. His fellow commander in Idlib province next to Aleppo, Afef Soleimani, has done the same. People like them have facilitated United Nations humanitarian convoys to get to camps and to people in need.

²³³ Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, 113th Congress, 1st Session, April 17, 2013. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2013, accessed September 23, 2014, www.gpo.gov/fdsys.

They have actually tamped down in some cases the extremists. For example, extremists tried to block the UN humanitarian convoys up in Idlib, and the gentleman I met actually intervened on the ground himself to stop that.... There are good people that we could work with, Senator.²³⁴

Event Five: Two Months Later President Obama Approves Plan for CIA to Arm the Resistance (June 2013)

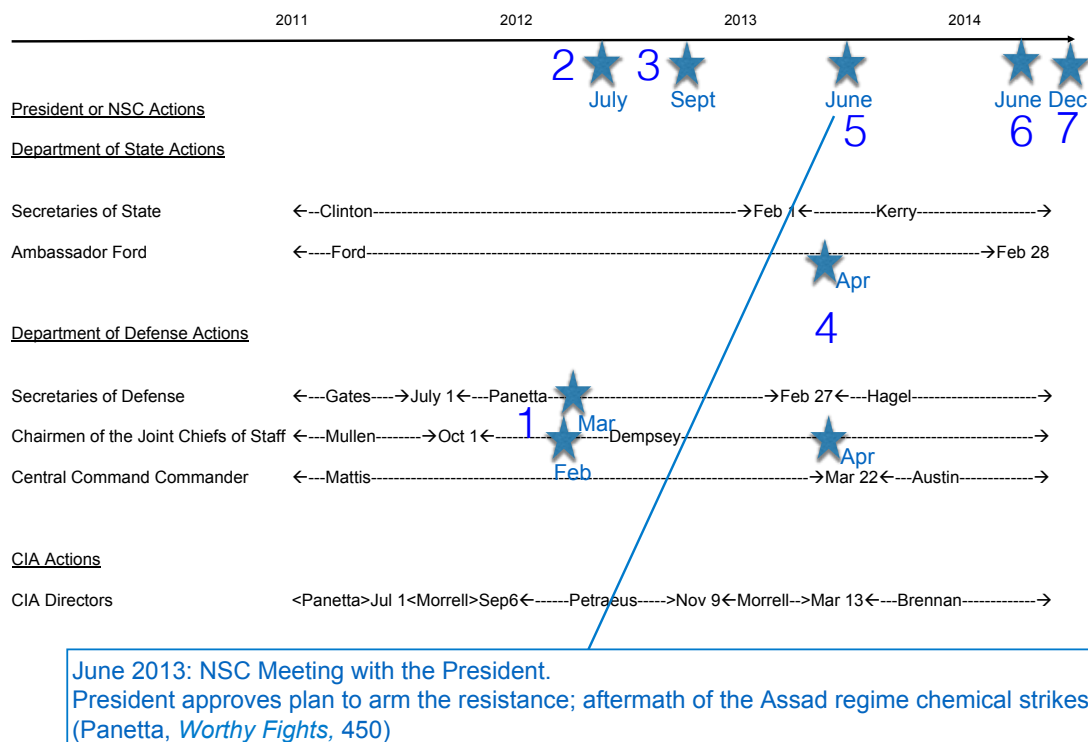


Figure 38: Two Months Later President Obama Approves Plan for CIA to Arm the Resistance (June 2013)

As the above figure shows, the fifth event would occur only two months later in June of 2013. During an NSC meeting, the president approved a CIA plan to arm the moderate resistance in the aftermath of the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons

²³⁴ *US Policy Toward Syria*. Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. 113th Congress, April 11, 2013, 20.

against his own people. The US military concurred with this proposal.²³⁵ As significant as the use of chemical weapons is in its own right, one is struck with how did the DoD so quickly come to now recognize the existence of a moderate resistance force that they denied existed just two months prior?

Another interesting piece to this puzzle is a memorandum from General Dempsey to Senator Carl Levin, the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, on July 19, 2013 – just one month after President Obama approved the CIA proposal to arm resistance elements. In the memorandum, General Dempsey outlines five options “on how military force could be used in order to decide whether it should be used.”²³⁶ General Dempsey listed the five options as: train, advise, and assist the opposition; conduct limited stand-off strikes; establish a no-fly zone; establish a buffer zone; and control chemical weapons. In describing the train, advise, and assist the opposition, the general labeled the advisory force as a “nonlethal force,” implying the advisors would be in a sanctuary area outside of Syria and not advising the resistance elements in combat in Syria. Moreover, while acknowledging that these options could not be assessed without the context of an overall whole-of-government strategy for achieving policy objectives, the general framed the option as one that would “help develop a moderate opposition – including their military capabilities – while maintaining pressure on the Assad regime.”²³⁷ It is interesting to note that this July option sounds very similar to what the general stated he could not support in his April testimony, and

²³⁵ Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014), 450.

²³⁶ Dempsey, Martin E., General, untitled memorandum to Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, July 19, 2013, accessed at thehill.com/images/stories/news/2013/07_july/22/Dempsey.pdf on November 17, 2017.

²³⁷ Ibid.

then what he concurred to for the CIA to undertake in June. When did the unfeasible option become feasible again? Only after CIA planners crafted such an option?

Event Six: In the Wake of the Fall of Mosul, President Obama Orders the Military to Train and Equip the Resistance in Their Fight Against ISIS, but not the Assad Regime (June 2014)

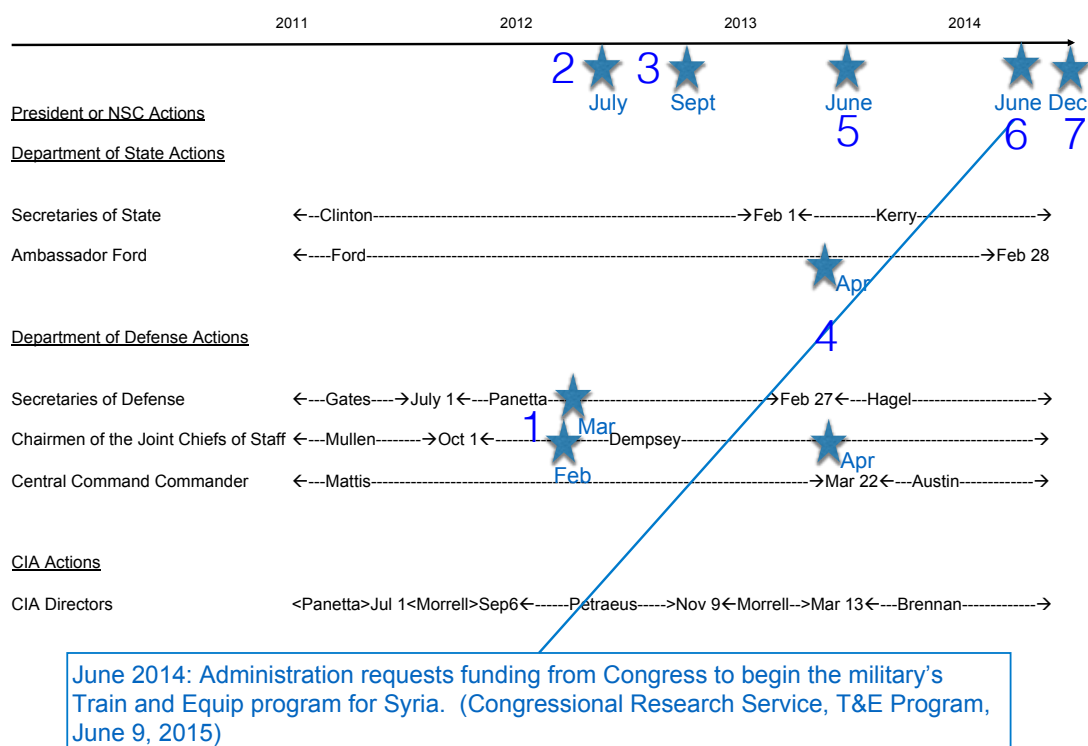


Figure 39: In the Wake of the Fall of Mosul, President Obama Orders the Military to Train and Equip the Resistance; Requests Funding from Congress (June 2014)

In June 2014 the major northern Iraqi city of Mosul fell to ISIS insurgents. This sixth significant event sent reverberations throughout Baghdad and Washington. Suddenly, Washington felt compelled to do something to respond, react, and reverse the ISIS advances. (See Figure 39 above.) In the wake of Mosul's fall, the US

president directed and approved DoD plans to not only deploy US troops back to Iraq to assist the Iraqi military, but also to train and equip Syrian resistance forces to fight ISIS – but not Assad’s forces. The administration requested the necessary appropriations from Congress in June.²³⁸ Did the viable and acceptable Syrian resistance suddenly and coincidentally present themselves to US government representatives?

Event Seven: Congress Approves the Funding for the DoD Train and Equip Operation (December 2014)

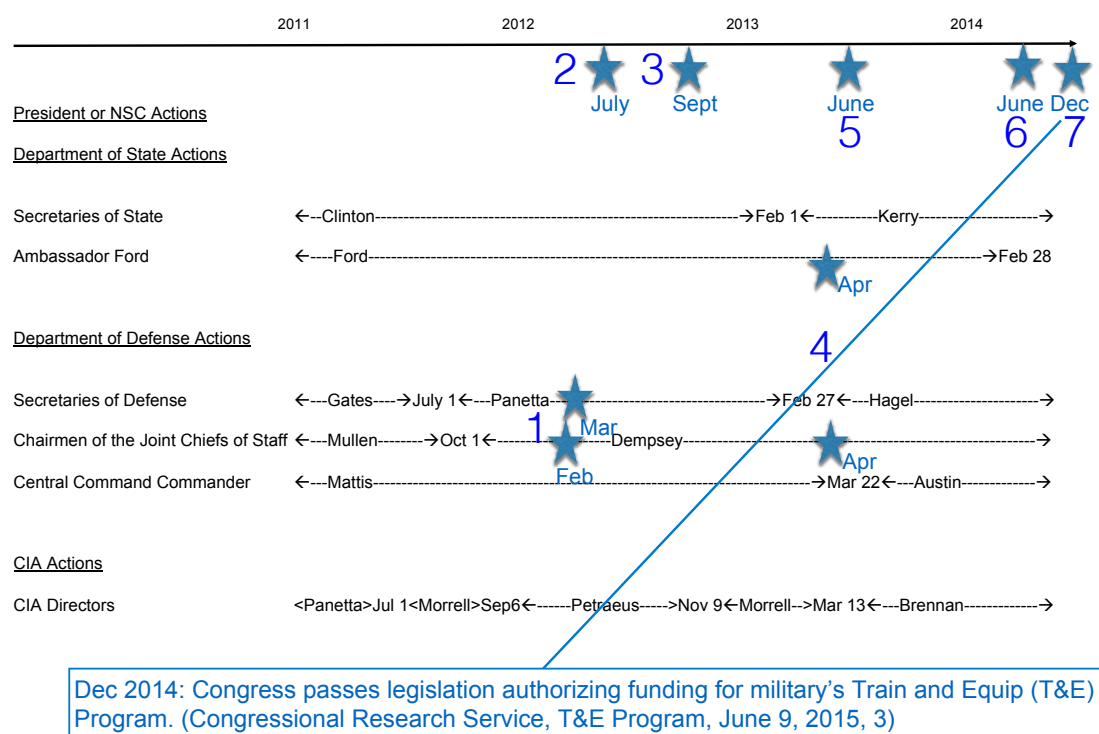


Figure 40: Congress Approves Funding for DoD’s Train and Equip Mission (Dec 2014)

²³⁸ Congressional Research Services, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and US Response* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service report RL33487, October 9, 2015), 2.

The seventh and final decision-making event occurred in December 2014 when Congress finally passed legislation authorizing funding for the military's train-and-equip mission with the Syrian resistance.²³⁹ (See Figure 40 above.) Nearly four years after the Syrian rebels rose up in opposition to the Assad regime did the US government appropriate money for the military to assist them – and then, only with the very limited aim of the counter-ISIS fight, with prohibitions on fighting Assad's forces except in self-defense.

Given the full context of the framework behind these seven key events in the macro-level process-tracing chart in Appendix A, and the resulting detailed analysis of the seven events in the micro-level process-tracing charts above that shows which national security decision-maker provided what input, when, why, and how, the reader should clearly see the following findings. First, a viable and acceptable Syrian resistance did exist. It was manifested not only in the sheer number of fighters, as shown in chapter 3, but in a loose but recognizable organization that allowed the US embassy in Damascus to establish contact with local resistance leaders and provide them with advice, assistance, and equipment to enable a network of resistance activists that numbered 1,500. Second, what is even more remarkable than the first finding above, is that the US military did not recognize this and conducted no commensurate planning that could have supported the resistance. The US military did not provide such an MSRA/UW plan for the president to consider beyond the thin list of options provided

²³⁹ Ibid., 3.

in July 2013.²⁴⁰ The frustration level that the Secretary of State and even the Secretary Defense would express towards the conventional military's inability to provide such options is striking.

Did President Obama's Views on War Skew his Subordinates' Inputs?

This is a valid concern. Skeptics might say that the preceding charts are too antiseptic and sterile; they fail to include the fact that the president was arguably largely elected by running a campaign focused on ending two unpopular wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Deliberately or inadvertently initiating another war would unravel his domestic and international political goals. Moreover, even if he never overtly or directly made such comments to his department and agency chiefs, they would have clearly understood them from witnessing the political campaign and being with the president for many months, or in some cases years. The skeptic would argue that this accounts for the decision-making and it might not be apparent in a frame-by-frame depicted that I presented.

I would disagree. First, there would be no reason for Clinton and Panetta to mask that presidential guidance – either delivered formally or informally – in their accounts of these events in their memoirs. Moreover, the president himself, in a lengthy interview he conducted with the television news program *60 Minutes*, instead talked about his desire to assist the Syrian resistance to replace or coerce Assad to negotiate a political transition, but he had doubts it was achievable. In his words, he wanted to,

²⁴⁰ Martin E. Dempsey, General, untitled memorandum to Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, July 19, 2013, accessed at thehill.com/images/stories/news/2013/07_july/22/Dempsey.pdf on November 17, 2017.

“explore all the various options that are available”.²⁴¹ As Janine Davison, the former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans wrote, ultimately the military failed to “deliver the type of nuanced advice in the form of creative options that the president needs.”²⁴²

I will elaborate and dissect this interview in detail in Chapter Five when I address the rival hypotheses, including this one, in much more detail.

To close this section, however, it is important to remember that regardless of a president’s desires or political tendencies towards when, how, and why the US uses its military forces, it is incumbent upon the US military to provide the best military advice, which should include a full menu of options. The shortcoming was not with the president, but with his conventional military advisers who could not comprehend the idea of supporting the resistance as a suitable and feasible option. This argument is further advanced in the following sections of this chapter.

The Conceptual Framework Applied to the How and Why Questions

The theoretical basis for this dissertation is Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory that addresses complexity and an organization’s tendency to reproduce or reinforce its own structure and activities rather than to more openly or holistically address the

²⁴¹ Interview by Steve Kroft, *60 Minutes*, which aired October 11, 2015, and was accessed February 5, 2016, <http://cbsnews.com/news/president-obama-60-minutes-syria-isis-2016-presidential-race>.

²⁴² Janine Davidson, “The Contemporary Presidency: Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making: Explaining the Broken Dialogue,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 43 no.1, March 2013, 129.

challenge of change.²⁴³ This focus from Luhmann on complexity and an organization's processing of complexity is significantly more advanced than earlier systems theorists' work that tended to focus on structural-functionalism and relatively simple input and output designs. Although I refer to structural-functionalism in a later portion of this chapter, I frame this under the more useful theoretical construct of Luhmann's systems theory, which captures complexity and ultimately organizational culture in a much more illuminating and applicable manner. Specifically, Luhmann suggests that when an organization has established a mechanism to reduce uncertainty, other alternative options are likely to be discarded. As such, Luhmann's approach to system theory and its work with complexity are more applicable to today's national security environment than the earlier simplistic structural-functionalism theories.

There are several main components to Luhmann's theory applicable to answering the how and why questions in this dissertation: autopoiesis, complexity, rationality, communications, and decisions.

Autopoiesis, literally meaning self-production or creation, refers to a system or organization that reproduces or maintains itself or its boundaries like a biological cell. Luhmann emphasized the reflective and self-reproductive nature of this action for systems or organizations.²⁴⁴ Luhmann argued that the environment is a distinct element that exists outside or beyond the boundaries of the autopoiesis system. In this case of this dissertation, "environment" refers to the Arab Spring uprisings in general and the Syrian rebellion in particular. How well the system or organization could

²⁴³ Niklas Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, trans. Peter Gilgen (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013).

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, viii-xiv.

recognize and respond to developments in the environment, especially with the organization's desire to continue to reproduce itself in its current image (of a conventional military), bears a strong resemblance to how the US military responded – or did not respond -- to the rebellion in Syria.

Luhmann's writings on complexity provide an insightful lens to view the Syria case. Luhmann argued that a system or organization "bundles" complex developments in the environment and then undertakes indifference or other arrangements to deal with this complexity. The system engages in a "reduction of complexity" by ignoring or treating the new developments with a template or design that it previously experienced under different conditions.²⁴⁵ Consequently, the organization is not fully seeing, understanding, and then developing appropriate responses to the new development. Instead, the system or organization has a "tendency to limit the problem to the question of the arrangements that a system has at its disposal."²⁴⁶ As the reader saw in the preceding section, this helps to explain how and why the conventional military essentially generated only conventional military responses to the Syria situation.

In his discussion on rationality, Luhmann posits that systems or organizations will avoid or exclude developments that are deemed risky before they then rationally evaluate possible response options. In Luhmann's words, there is "always a non-rational zone outside the marked space" for rational consideration.²⁴⁷ Although the military planners mentioned supporting the resistance, this option always appeared as outside the list of the "rational" options more readily under consideration.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 121.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 124.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 136.

Luhmann considered communications as essential for the system or organization to reproduce or reinforce itself.²⁴⁸ The flow of information, from recognition, to understanding, to crafting responses, all underscore the significance of communications, or the transmission and reception of information, to shaping decision-making for an organization or system. This flow of information was the focus of the process-tracing methodology used to examine the decision-making associated with the Syrian rebellion, and in this upcoming section I provide additional research that underscores how the structure and culture of the US military excludes subject matter expertise of unconventional warfare community from effectively entering the decision-making process.

Luhmann considered organizations as social systems that would reproduce themselves on the basis of their internal decisions.²⁴⁹ Based upon the organization's processing of information, the organization would decide what actions to take and these decisions would shape the conditions for future decisions or adaptation. Thus, prior conventional warfare decisions, like the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, would form a precedent for shaping future decisions and adaptations.

Joseph Pilotta, Timothy Widman, and Susan Jasko further developed Luhmann's theory with a focus on organizational culture. The authors argued "organizational culture serves the maintenance and development of organizations by providing important ordering mechanisms that further the

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 15.

organization's domination of complex information environments."²⁵⁰ They argued Luhmann reduced "complexity by simultaneously transmitting both a selected alternative from among multiple action possibilities and the motivation for the acceptance of that selection."²⁵¹ Of significance, they added, "Organizational culture consists primarily of open-ended context framed by significant symbols and modes of legitimated social action that enables selective responses to changes."²⁵² As this dissertation shows, the "selective responses to change" would not include MSRA options.

Luhmann's theory raises the question: Was the conventional military open to new or creative ideas to support the Syrian resistance? A glimpse of the answer may be found with research published at the Army War College in 2013.²⁵³ Researchers Stephen J. Gerras and Leonard Wong wrote, "Personality data gathered at the US Army War College from lieutenant colonel and colonel students show that the most successful officers score lower in openness than the general US population.... To make matters worse, though, those ... students selected for brigade command score even lower than the overall (student) average. This raises an interesting paradox: The leaders recognized and

²⁵⁰ Joseph J. Pilotta, Timothy J. Widman, and Susan A. Jasko, "Meaning and Action in the Organizational Setting: An Interpretive Approach", in *An Introduction to Niklas Luhmann: Logic and Investigations*, ed. Joseph J. Pilotta and Wei-San Sun (New York: Hampton Press, 2014), 148.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁵³ The Army War College is one of several senior service colleges that the military operates for senior military officers one or two grade levels below the rank of general or admiral. Indeed, it is intended to be the last military education for these officers before some of them are selected to become generals or admirals, and thus, becomes their last educational preparation before that rank.

selected by the Army to serve at strategic levels – where uncertainty and complexity are greatest – tend to have lower levels of one of the attributes most related to success at strategic levels.”²⁵⁴ Of note, this is not to say that Army senior officers are not intelligent, indeed, their IQs are above average; however, the research suggests that the highly successful officers may have narrow career paths that result in their deflection of considering options that do not fit their experiences. This finding is very much in accordance with Niklas Luhmann’s theory of how an entity deals with complexity by rejecting or deflecting new information that does not comport with its views. As Gerras and Wong continue, the officer can “...often fail at exploring the issue fully to appreciate other perspectives and perhaps change their minds.”²⁵⁵

With this review of the theoretical construct of the dissertation as a prelude, the stage is set to examine the how and why questions.

How Did the US Make this Decision?

To answer the “how” with greater specificity, I used a systems theory approach that that included structural-functionalism to examine the military decision-making process for providing inputs to the National Security Council. This approach revealed the inherent flaws for developing military support to resistance activities by marginalizing such experts from they key operational positions in the decision-making process.

²⁵⁴ Stephen J. Gerras and Leonard Wong, *Changing Minds in the Army: Why It Is So Difficult And What To Do About It* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, October 2013), 9.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

There are two supporting structural-functionalism elements to the “how” explanation. The first is the split in operational responsibilities between the two types of combatant commands of the military, which consequently marginalizes the operational contributions of US Special Operations Command and its inherent UW expertise. The second is the assignment of Special Forces generals primarily to positions in these non-operational commands. I examine each of these in the following sections.

Structural-Functionalism: The Split in Operational Responsibilities and Marginalization of US Special Operations Command

The US military’s decision-making process, and how it provides inputs to the National Security Council deliberations, is a classic example of systems theory and structural-functionalism. The process is codified in military directives and doctrinal publications and is taught throughout the various military universities and colleges. The directives and doctrine define and prescribe the various planning inputs and outputs; who produces what estimate, plan or order; and how it is provided to the Secretary of Defense and President for a decision.

The highest echelon of this military decision-making process is the Secretary of Defense. He is directly responsible to the President, and indeed, only the President and the Secretary of Defense are authorized to provide orders to the military to execute combat operations.²⁵⁶ The senior generals and admirals of the military cannot make such orders without the prior order of the President or Secretary of Defense.

²⁵⁶ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, August 11, 2011), II-15.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principal military advisor to the President and to the Secretary. When the President or Secretary issue orders to the various elements of the military, the President and Secretary use the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and his Joint Staff to prepare, write, and transmit those orders to the major combatant commands of the US military.



<http://intercepts.defensenews.com/2014/03/cocom-not-official-acronym-for-combatant-command-but-dod-uses-it-anyway/> accessed February 8, 2017

Figure 41: The Nine Combatant Commands:
Six Regional and Three Functional

As Figure 41 above shows, there are two distinct types of combatant commands: the geographic combatant commands (shown in the top two rows of the above figure) and the functional combatant commands (shown in the bottom row). The former are responsible for conducting military operations in a geographic region of the world while the latter are responsible for functional activities, like special operations (i.e., US Special

Operations Command) or strategic nuclear weapons (i.e., the US Strategic Command). Within this dichotomy of responsibilities, however, the geographic combatant commands have emerged as the first among equals. Indeed, US Special Operations Command's mission is largely constrained to providing special operations forces to the geographic commands for the latter to actually conduct the operations. To be sure, US Special Operations Command is also responsible for synchronizing the planning of special operations worldwide, but the actual conduct and execution of those operations are almost exclusively the responsibility of the geographic combatant command.²⁵⁷ (See Figure 42 below.)

²⁵⁷ US Special Operations Command, *Special Operations Forces Reference Manual* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, June 2015), 2-1.

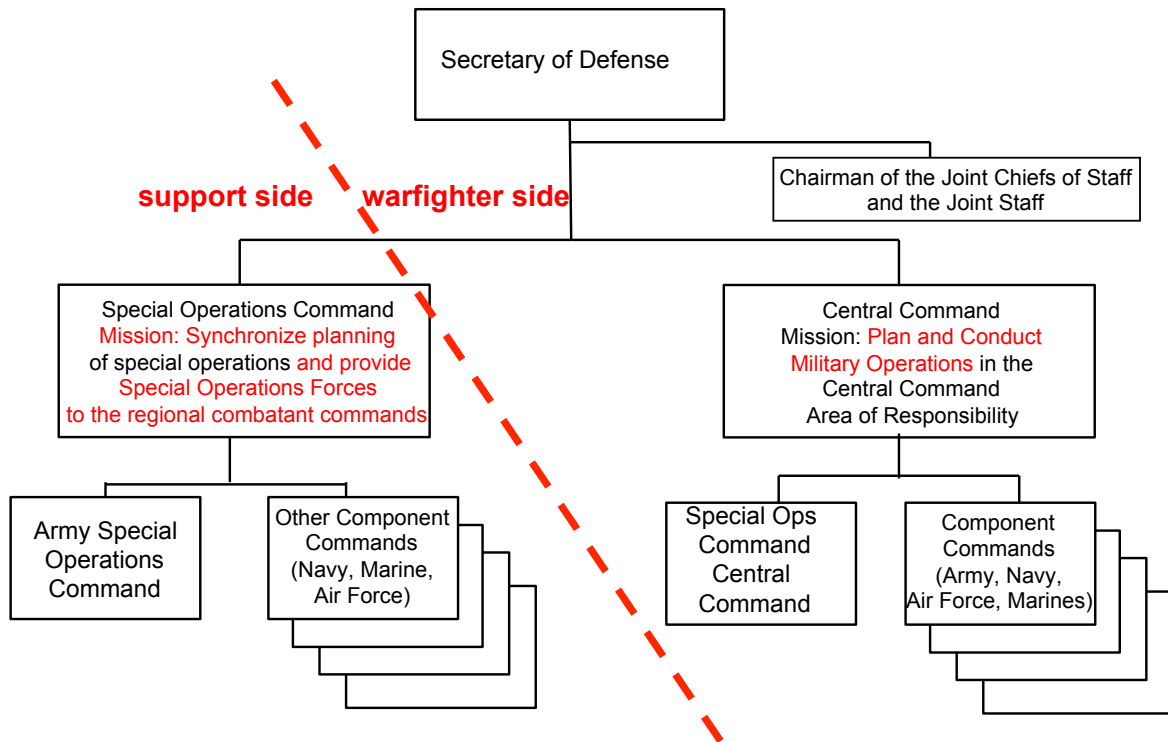


Figure 42: The Structure of the Chain of Command and Operational Responsibilities Between Special Operations Command and Central Command

Given that construct, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon procedurally would task the geographic combatant command for a strategic estimate and plan to address an emerging conflict or contingency, like the Syrian rebellion. By doctrine this tasking would go to any combatant command, geographic or function, but in practice, in situations like the Syrian rebellion, it would go to the geographic combatant command, in this case US Central Command.²⁵⁸ In the opening years of the Syrian rebellion, according to testimony

²⁵⁸ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, August 11, 2011), B-1, xiii. It is interesting to note that although the text of this joint publication states that this guidance applies to

provided by General Dempsey in March 2012, the options under consideration were all conventional military responses – “humanitarian relief, no-fly zone, maritime interdiction, humanitarian corridor, and limited aerial strikes.”²⁵⁹ As confirming evidence to the above, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta would write in his 2014 memoirs, “We presented a set of options to the National Security Council — ranging from...limited air strikes...protecting refugee camps and supporting regional allies.”²⁶⁰ However, as referenced earlier in this chapter, in July 2013 the Chairman did provide a list of options that included training, advising, and assisting the opposition, but that list of options was neither a plan nor a recommendation for one specific option.²⁶¹

Structural-Functionalism: The Assignment of Special Forces General Officers to Non-Operational Positions

Given the split of combat responsibilities between the types of commands, it is significant to examine where the Special Forces general officers are assigned to see if the UW expertise is “plugged into” the organizations with operational responsibilities (the geographic combatant commands) or to the commands with supporting responsibilities (e.g., Special Operations Command). Additionally, one needs to

combatant commands (implying both the geographical and functional types) it is listed under the heading of “geographical combatant commanders”.

²⁵⁹ *The Situation in Syria, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate*, 100th Congress, 2nd session (March 7, 2012), accessed September 23, 2014, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsy/pkg/CHRG-112shrg76271/html/CHRG-112shrg7621.htm>.

²⁶⁰ Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 448.

²⁶¹ Dempsey, Martin E., General, untitled memorandum to Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, July 19, 2013, accessed at thehill.com/images/stories/news/2013/07_july/22/Dempsey.pdf on November 17, 2017.

examine the Joint Staff structure to see if Special Forces general officers hold influential positions there. (See Figures 43 and 44 below.)

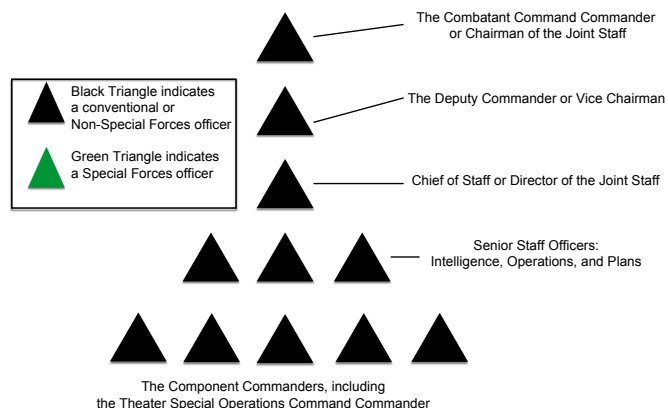


Figure 43: Senior Leader Legend to Describe Figure 44

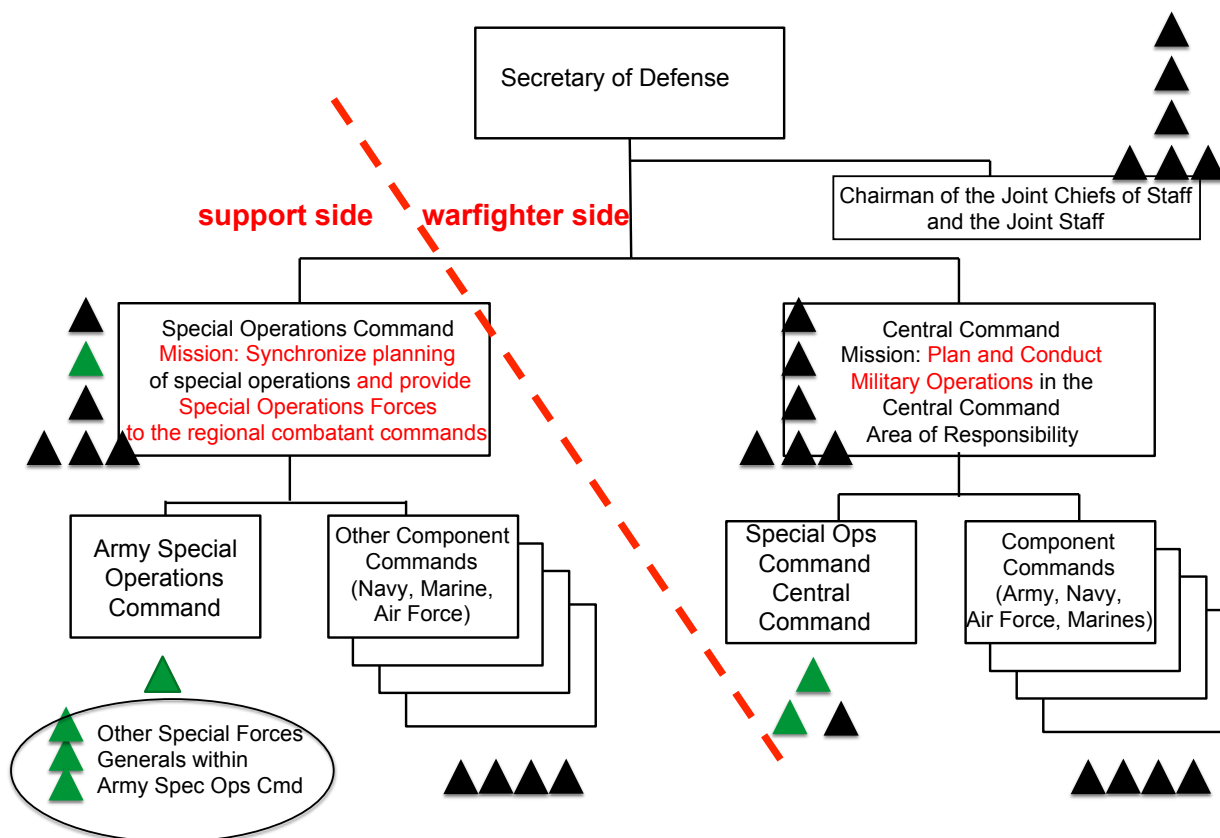


Figure 44: The Structure Overlaid with Key Leader Assignments Filled by Special Forces Generals (2011-2014)

The key operational military decision-making positions – the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, his Vice Chairman, the Director of the Joint Staff, the Joint Staff's senior intelligence (J-2), operations (J-3), and plans (J-5) officers, and the commensurate positions in the geographic combatant commands – are almost always held by conventional military officers with neither experience nor significant education in UW. Rarely has a Special Forces general officer been assigned to one of these positions. Indeed, since 9/11 and through 2013, only once has a Special Forces general officer been assigned to any of these positions, and then for only a one-year period.²⁶²

Aside from the key positions within the geographic combatant commands of the commander, the deputy commander, the chief of staff, and the intelligence, operations, and plans staff principals, there is also the position of the commander of the subordinate theater special operations command (TSOC), which is under the operational control of the geographic combatant commander. The TSOC commander is always a Special Operations Forces (SOF) general or admiral, whose career path is usually not Special Forces. He could be a special operations pilot, SEAL (naval special warfare operator; the acronym stands for “sea, air, or land” infiltration environments), Marine Raider, or Army Ranger. But recall that none of these other special operations officers are immersed by their professional career in the mission area of UW. By the military's design, structure, doctrine, training, and career patterns, UW is the domain of the

²⁶² This one exception was Major General Sal Cambria who held the J3 position in the Africa Command from 2011-2012. One might also argue that General Hugh Shelton, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1997-2001 also fits this categorization. Although General Shelton did serve with Special Forces in Vietnam for sixteen months, that is the extent of his Special Forces experience. For the remainder of his career, he served in conventional Infantry officer assignments. See his biography at jcs.mil.

Special Forces profession. Consequently, although each geographic combatant command has a SOF general officer or admiral commanding a subordinate SOF headquarters, one is as likely to see a non-Special Forces SOF officer commanding a TSOC as one is to find a Special Forces general in command. Even then, however, this is a subordinate element to the geographic combatant command, so any mission tasks or responses for the development of UW plans or operations is still subject to the review and filter from the conventional senior officers in the higher geographic combatant command headquarters.

Within this structure the influence or clout exercised by a TSOC within a geographic command may not be as strong and influential as an outsider might believe. In a recent study from the Council on Foreign Relations, Linda Robinson, who specializes in researching SOF, wrote: “They (the TSOCs) are supposed to be the principal advisors on special operations to their respective geographic combatant commanders, but they rarely have received the respect and support of the four-star command.”²⁶³

Robinson details her findings with, “The most glaring and critical operational deficit is the fact that, according to doctrine, the theater special operations commands are supposed to be the principal node for planning and conducting special operations in a given theater – yet they are the most severely under-resourced commands. Rather than world-class integrators of ...capabilities, TSOCs are egregiously short of sufficient quantity and quality of staff and intelligence, analytical, and planning resources.”²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Linda Robinson, *The Future of US Special Operations Forces* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations, Special Report No. 66, April 2013), 15.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

Robinson concludes with, “Because of this lack of resources, theater special operations commands have been unable to fulfill their role of planning and conducting special operations.”²⁶⁵

Given the structural handicaps, one may reasonably ask, where are the Special Forces general officers? Many are assigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina where they are in key positions within the Army’s Special Operations Command, the subordinate Army command to the US Special Operations Command. The Army Special Operations Command is responsible for training, manning, and equipping all Army SOF, which includes the Special Forces units. In other words, the Army Special Operations Command prepares its units for combat as opposed to leading them in combat.

Thus, by structure and function, the military has both an organizational design and a decision-making process that marginalizes the Special Forces and their UW expertise from operational decision-making.

Why Did the US Make this Decision? Institutional Culture: The Military’s Conservative and Conventional Culture

As I wrote in the introduction to this chapter, to answer the “why” portion, I show that the conventional senior military leaders, in accordance with Luhmann’s theory, are prone to see and react to developments in their environments that make sense only from their autopoiesis-based frame of reference. In other words, they are biased towards providing conventional warfare solutions. This aspect of Luhmann’s Systems

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Theory is congruent with classic institutional or bureaucracy culture theory, which suggests that conventional military officers would offer conventional military solutions.

I divide this section into three supporting elements: first, an overview of some data points which underscore the small size of unconventional warfare expertise within the US military; second, an overview of current research on this topic; and third, results of interviews with two retired senior military officers and one former senior Department of Defense official, which are key to seeing the relationship between this institutional culture and military inputs to national security decision-making.

First, some data points are illuminating. Using the rubric of *follow the money*, less than 4% of the defense budget is allocated towards special operations forces (SOF), the remaining 96% going to the conventional military.²⁶⁶ The 4% figure covers both SOF-unique costs, like the specialized training and equipment required for SOF, but also broader support services provided by the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. Of important note, this 4% covers the entire range of SOF missions – like the expensive counter-terrorist operations – while UW remains just one of twelve missions or core activities assigned to SOF.²⁶⁷ Thus, the actual percentage of DoD dollars applied to the UW mission set is arguably well below 2% of the DoD budget.

In addition to examining where defense dollars are allocated, it is very revealing to examine the military's doctrinal writings. Although the US Army has published Army doctrine on UW for several decades, the joint force doctrine (that doctrine used by all

²⁶⁶ William McRaven, Admiral, *Posture Statement of the US Special Operations Command* to the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 6, 2012, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/McRaven%2003-06-121.pdf>.

²⁶⁷ US Special Operations Command, *Special Operations Forces Reference Manual* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, June 2015), 1-6.

the services – Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines – to fight as a complete or “joint” team) for UW was not published until September 2015, actually after the focus period of this dissertation.²⁶⁸ This is clear evidence of the lack of attention and focus the conventional military has had towards UW.

To the extent that military doctrine is a foundational element for the professional education of US military officers, this lack of joint doctrine is an indicator of the absence of UW within the professional development of the officer corps. Indeed, a review of the curriculum for the National War College (one of several senior level colleges for military officers at the grade immediately prior to becoming a general officer or admiral) reveals no mention of unconventional warfare.²⁶⁹ Dr. Hy Rothstein, in his case study of Afghanistan and unconventional warfare, wrote, “There appears to be precious little thinking about UW going on in the institution of the profession of arms. The war colleges are dedicated to the principle of thinking, but they appear to have produced senior military leaders skilled in the art of attrition warfare, the war fighting approach that succeeded in two world wars, (but) resulted in stalemate in Korea, and lost in Vietnam.”²⁷⁰

Second, the US military’s conservative and conventional culture is well documented in a wealth of national security and military literature and research. Morton Halperin’s seminal work on bureaucracy theory and foreign policy documented this

²⁶⁸ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-05.1, Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, September 2015).

²⁶⁹ *National War College Student Catalog*. National Defense University, Academic Year 2015/2016.

²⁷⁰ Hy Rothstein, *Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 169.

finding in his first edition in 1974 through his current edition in 2006.²⁷¹ Similarly, Amos Jordan's research on *American National Security* first published in 1981 and updated through 2009 also highlighted and confirmed the conservative and conventional nature of these institutions, their culture, and resulting way of thinking.²⁷² Roger Z. George and Harvey Rishikof's textbook *The National Security Enterprise* highlights the various institutional cultures of the national security departments and agencies, and spares no criticism of the military services' cultures and "tribalism" that affect policy-making.²⁷³ Colin Gray, who I cited in the opening quotation to this chapter, extended this argument and showed how the conservative and conventional officers exhibit a disdain towards special operations, which include UW operations.²⁷⁴

To those that would argue the above literature is outdated, that the US military's wartime activities since 9/11 have upended such traditional writings, I highlight the case study research that Dr. Hy Rothstein conducted on SOF in Afghanistan, which also underscored the cultural cleavages between the conventional and unconventional military forces, and within SOF between the direct action forces and the unconventional warfare elements of Army Special Forces. Although his findings and recommendations

²⁷¹ Morton H. Halperin and Priscilla A. Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 2006), 32-33; 274, 304-305.

²⁷² Amos A. Jordan et al., *American National Security*, 6th ed. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 174-178, 336-344.

²⁷³ Roger Z. George and Harvey Rishikof, eds., *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating the Labyrinth* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 117-135.

²⁷⁴ Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 151, 154-155.

are different than mine from this Syrian case study (I review those differences in chapter 6), the analysis of the cultural cleavages is quite similar.²⁷⁵

To continue this line of reasoning that challenges the presupposition that the military's post-9/11 operations have upended the traditional writings cited above, it is illuminating to read Janine Davidson, the Deputy Assistance Secretary of Defense for Plans from 2009-2012. In 2013 she wrote about the military's organizational culture and detailed planning process that ultimately fails to deliver creative options that the president needs.

What often appears to be a personality-driven or political debate between the commander-in-chief and his strong-minded military advisors actually has deeper institutional and cultural roots. The 'professional' military officer has certain expectations about how to craft 'best military advice' for the president that are deeply embedded into the organizational culture and in fact hard-wired into the institutionalized and incredibly detailed military planning process.... Ultimately, the output of the military's planning process fails to deliver the type of nuanced advice in the form of creative options that the president needs.²⁷⁶

Davidson's reference to "creative options that the president needs" links to President Obama's views voiced in an interview in 2016:

The goal here as been to find a way in which we can help moderate opposition on the ground.... I've been skeptical from the get go about the notion that we were going to effectively create this proxy army inside of Syria. My goal has been to try to test that proposition.... I think it is important for us to make sure that we explore all of the various options that are available.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Hy Rothstein, *Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006), xiv, xvi, 176, 177.

²⁷⁶ Janine Davidson, "The Contemporary Presidency: Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision-Making: Explaining the Broken Dialogue," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 43 no.1, March 2013, 129.

²⁷⁷ Interview by Steve Kroft, *60 Minutes*, which aired October 11, 2015, and was accessed February 5, 2016, at <http://cbsnews.com/news/president-obama-60-minutes-syria-isis-2016-presidential-race>.

A military option for supporting the resistance would not reach the president until after Mosul fell in 2014, and then it was constrained to a counter-terrorism operation against ISIS, not the unconventional warfare task focused on the Assad regime.

The impact of institutional culture and military decision-making was the topic in a recently article in the US Army War College's journal, *Parameters*. Written by its then-Commandant, Major General William E. Rapp, the article directly addressed this institutional culture impact on decision-making. In examining military inputs to national security policy discussions, he found, "Culture, psychology, and decision-making structure place limits on the development, delivery, and impact of effective military voice in national security policy discussions."²⁷⁸ He went on to specifically highlight the limiting factor that institutional culture has on providing military advice: "Strongly ingrained military culture and the psychological biases of individual military leaders, and those who support them, provide the first set of limits on effectively providing unconstrained and high-quality military advice."²⁷⁹ In direct accordance with Alex Mintz theory on foreign policy decision-making, Major General Rapp added, "(these) biases are ingrained, and cognitive heuristics guide our perceptions and interpretations of reality."²⁸⁰

Briefly making an excursion here from the institutional culture section of this chapter and returning to the previous section dealing with structure and function, Major General Rapp ties these two aspects together by noting, "Purposeful, restrictive access

²⁷⁸ William E. Rapp, Major General, "Toward Strategic Solvency: Ensuring Effective Military Voice," *Parameters: The US Army War College Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 4, Winter 2016-2017, 13.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

to the decision-making process is perhaps the most pernicious structural factor limiting full and honest expressions of effective military advice.”²⁸¹ He cautions there are gatekeepers to the decision-makers that would act as “mind-guards” to “prevent off-azimuth opinions from reaching the top decision-makers.”²⁸²

In an interview concerning this dissertation, Major General Rapp, now retired, also added these institutional cultural divides exist not only between the conventional military and special operations forces, but are also found within SOF between the direct action units that specialize in the direct action missions of kill/capture raids and the unconventional warfare elements traditionally in the US Army Special Forces units. In his assessment, perhaps some of the confusion in crafting options to support resistance activities actually emanates from within the SOF ranks themselves.²⁸³

Dr. Christopher Lamb, a former senior Department of Defense and State official who served as the director of policy planning in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, offered this precise assessment:

Most officers at the senior ranks who deal with political leaders have no experience with special operations and have only a limited understanding of the requirements and risks of these missions.... The military has traditionally not valued SOF as much as it has conventional forces.... The combination of ignorance of and prejudice against SOF that marks conventional commanders means that those with whom civilians are most in contact and who hold positions in the military bureaucracy between politicians and special operations are limited

²⁸¹ Ibid., 20

²⁸² Ibid., 21.

²⁸³ William E. Rapp, Major General, US Army (retired), former Commandant of the US Army War College, in an interview with the author November 1, 2017.

in their ability to provide the risk assessments and control that should accompany any consideration of using these forces.²⁸⁴

In a subsequent interview with Dr. Lamb, he also extended this argument to inside the SOF ranks, highlighting the divide between the direct action forces and those who specialize in unconventional warfare. He spoke of the “different ethos, cultures, and histories” of the two camps, and he experienced that divide even within his office at the Assistance Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict by the various officers assigned to his section.²⁸⁵

Additional discourse to this topic came from Lieutenant General Charles T. Cleveland, US Army (retired) in an interview concerning this dissertation, too. General Cleveland was the three-star commander of the US Army Special Operations Command from 2012 to 2015, making him the senior Green Beret commander during nearly all of the time period focus of this dissertation. Of significance to this dissertation, he spent a thirty-plus year career in Special Forces living the experience of these organizational, cultural, and structural issues. General Cleveland affirmed that in Syria the US did miss this opportunity and that we were structured improperly.²⁸⁶ But he cautioned against an overly critical approach towards conventional military officers and likewise an overly focused approach on expanding Special Forces officer assignments as the remedy. Instead, he stressed the responsibility of the military, as an institution, to train and

²⁸⁴ David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 230-231. This assessment was confirmed during an interview with the author on November 17, 2017.

²⁸⁵ Dr. Christopher J. Lamb, in an interview with the author November 17, 2017.

²⁸⁶ Charles Cleveland T. Cleveland, Lieutenant General, US Army (retired), (three-star Commanding General, U.S. Army Special Operations Command from 2012-2015) in an interview with the author March 27, 2017.

educate conventional military officers on these irregular and unconventional types of warfare so that they can better represent all of these options to the geographic combatant commanders and to the joint staff. In his words, “We don’t necessarily need Green Berets in key positions; we need senior officers better educated and experienced in Special Warfare, including unconventional warfare.”²⁸⁷

In summary, in addition to the rich literature that documents the conventional and conservative nature of the US military; a review of current resourcing, doctrine, and educational curriculum for senior officers; and three senior leader interviews -- especially the interview with the senior Green Beret officer during this period -- all point to a conventional US military culture that will by its very nature marginalize unconventional warfare expertise, sometimes even within the SOF ranks itself. In Lieutenant General Cleveland’s words, “In Syria, we did miss this opportunity. We are structured improperly and there are people who don’t believe in this type of warfare.”²⁸⁸

Chapter Summary

This chapter is the heart of the dissertation. The previous chapter clearly showed that a viable and acceptable resistance did exist in Syria in the March 2011 to June 2014 period. With that fact established, this chapter then explained how and why the US missed the opportunity to train, advise, and equip these resistance elements.

To answer the “how and why” the US made this decision, I based the analysis on Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory as the conceptual framework. To answer the “how” portion, in addition to Luhmann’s system theory, I added a supporting structural-

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

functionalism approach to examine the military decision-making process for providing inputs to the National Security Council. This approach revealed the inherent flaws for developing military support to resistance activities by marginalizing unconventional warfare experts from the key operational positions in the decision-making. To answer the “why” portion, I showed that the conventional senior military leaders, in accordance with Luhmann’s theory, are prone to see and react to developments in their environments that make sense only from their autopoiesis-based frame of reference. In other words, they are predisposed to select those options – in this case conventional warfare options – that they are comfortable with when faced with a complex situation, the dynamics or details of which they are unfamiliar or unaccustomed.

In both of these cases – the how and the why – the analysis is fully congruent with Alex Mintz’ Integrated Cognitive and Rationale Theory of Foreign Policy Decision-Making, as described in chapter one. Moreover, the “how” portion is consistent with classic structural-functionalism and the “why” portion is consistent with institutional culture theory, which would suggest that conventional military officers would offer conventional military solutions.

The co-reading of this chapter with Appendix A, the process-trace chart, was essential. This methodology showed the interrelationship of over one hundred significant events, which allowed for the distillation of seven key US national security decision-making events that crystalized the decision outputs to the National Security Council.

Moreover, reviewing and analyzing the decision-making inputs from the key national security participants was equally important. These leaders include the

Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US Ambassador to Syria and other lower ranking but key persons privy to the decision-making. Ambassador Ford's insights to the US decision-making were key and essential, while General Cleveland's decades-long observations and experience with the cultural conflict between conventional and unconventional military forces was equally significant in the causal analysis of the research question.

Collectively, this chapter showed a US military structure and process for providing advice to the president as flawed due to the marginalization of UW expertise. This marginalization resulted in inadequate consideration for applying UW as a strategic option to the nation.

However, before we review the implications of these findings, I must explain and analyze the counter-arguments and plausible rival hypotheses, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE:
THE COUNTER-ARGUMENTS, PLAUSIBLE RIVAL HYPOTHESES, AND
SYNTHESIZING THE RESULTS

--“The goal here has been to find a way in which we can help moderate opposition on the ground, but we’ve never been under any illusion that militarily we ourselves can solve the problem inside of Syria.

--“Over time, the community of nations will all get rid of them (ISIS) and we will be leading getting rid of them. But we are not going to be able to get rid of them unless there is an environment inside of Syria and in portions of Iraq in which local populations, local Sunni populations, are working in a concerted way with us to get rid of them.

--“I’ve been skeptical from the get go about the notion that we were going to effectively create this proxy army inside of Syria. My goal has been to try to test that proposition, can we be able to train and equip a moderate opposition that’s willing to fight ISIL? And what we’ve learned is that as long as Assad remains in power, it is very difficult to get those folks to focus their attention on ISIL.

--“I think it is important for us to make sure that we explore all the various options that are available.”²⁸⁹

--President Barack Obama

Before moving to the final of the three questions in this dissertation (what are the implications for national security practitioners?), which is covered in the

²⁸⁹ Interview by Steve Kroft, *60 Minutes*, which aired October 11, 2015 and was accessed February 5, 2016, <http://cbsnews.com/news/president-obama-60-minutes-syria-isis-2016-presidential-race>.

next chapter, one needs to carefully consider the counter-arguments and plausible rival hypotheses to this dissertation that challenge the findings of the first two questions (was there a viable and acceptable resistance force in Syria in the period March 2011 – June 2014? and why and how did the US miss the opportunity to train, advise, and assist them?) If the analysis that answers the first two questions is faulty, the third question becomes irrelevant.

The Counter-Arguments

There are four counter-arguments that need to be understood and addressed. First, the US historically fails at military support to resistance movements (MSRM); it is not a good national security option to pursue in the first place. Second, if one accepts the validity of this dissertation's findings -- the resistance did exist and that the military failed to recognize and plan accordingly because unconventional warfare (UW) expertise was marginalized -- then the subsequent events of 2014-2015, when the president did decide to allow the US military to train and equip the moderate resistance, contradict this dissertation's hypothesis. This counter-argument states in the final analysis the military did present a UW option to the president. Third, the CIA should conduct MSRA/UW, not the Department of Defense; this type of operation is inappropriate for the US military. Fourth, the current military structure can adequately consider UW options; it just did not occur in this anomalous case. We need to review each of these counter-arguments. The following paragraphs will unpack, document, and analyze these arguments.

At the president's direction, in 2013 the CIA reviewed historical cases of US support to resistance movements to gauge the effectiveness of this option. Reporters immediately published articles claiming support to resistance movements usually failed.²⁹⁰ However, evidence from the former commanding general of the US Special Operations Command, General Joseph Votel, contradicts this. In an openly published article on UW he lists the initial invasion of Afghanistan (350 SOF and 110 interagency operatives embedded with 15,000 Afghan resistance fighters overthrew the Taliban regime), US support to the mujahedeen in Afghanistan to eject Soviet forces, US support to the contra resistance to the Nicaraguan Sandinista regime, US support to Croatian resistance in the Balkans conflict, US support to Kurdish Peshmerga forces during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, as recent examples to the contrary.²⁹¹ One could argue that when US advisors were present and directly involved with overseeing the delivery of the weapons and the necessary training, the degree of success was markedly higher. In addition, one must note that even when the conventional US military (non-SOF) is involved in arming a partner nation, there is a risk that weapons will eventually fall into an enemy's hands. Indeed, ISIS recovered many weapons – including armored vehicles – when Iraqi conventional army units deserted and fled in advance of ISIS forces on Mosul in

²⁹⁰Mark Mazzetti, "C.I.A. Study of Covert Aid Fueled Skepticism About Helping Syrian Rebels," *The New York Times*, October 14, 2014, accessed at February 24, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/15/us/politics/cia-study-says-arming-rebels-seldom-works.html>.

²⁹¹Joseph L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin, "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 1st Quarter 2016, 101-109.

2014. Thus, even setting aside General Votel's cogent points, this counterargument is not unique to UW activities and arguably not supported by the facts. The significant factor of having US advisors with these resistance elements should not be lost. This factor emerges again in the analysis of the implications of these findings in the next chapter.

The second counter-argument states that since the president ultimately did decide to train and equip the resistance in 2014, this is clear refutation of the dissertation's findings. However, upon closer examination, this is not the case. The president's decision to allow the US military to train and equip the Syrian resistance in 2014 was just that – a train and equip program. It was not UW. It was a counterterrorism program focused exclusively against ISIS vice a UW activity to disrupt, coerce, or overthrow the Assad regime; thus, it was not UW. Indeed, constraining the purpose of the assistance exclusively as an anti-ISIS fight alienated much of the Syrian resistance that was more concerned with unseating the brutal dictator in Damascus than in fighting ISIS.

The third counter-argument is the CIA should conduct MSRA, not the Department of Defense. Proponents of this counter-argument state that activities such as MSRA and UW belong to the CIA not the military. They would harvest many of my points – e.g., the military is too conventional – to make this counter-argument, plus they would add that such activities require secrecy and the avoidance of publicity, something these antagonists would argue is anathema to the military. While making some degree of sense on face value, and perhaps much sense to a conventional military officer, this counter-argument is overly

simplistic. The complexity and sophistication of MSRA and UW are such that it is not the sole domain of any one agency or department. Successful MSRA requires the partnership and teaming of both the CIA and the military. The CIA is most useful when deniability is paramount; after all, covert action is by definition deniable and a primary mission set of the CIA.²⁹² But when a larger-scale UW operation is required, such as toppling the Taliban regime in 2001 or harnessing the Kurds in the opening stage of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the military's Special Forces are the force of choice. The sophisticated planner would realize that it is the combination of both of these elements, sometimes in a synchronized fashion taking advantages of the unique advantages of each, becomes the preferred method of employment. Indeed, even with the 9/11 Commission recommendation that US Special Operations Command assume lead responsibility for directing and executing all paramilitary operations (both the CIA and military's) a closer examination of the recommendation by the military concluded that having capabilities resident in both the CIA and US Special Operations Command was the most preferred solution.²⁹³ Thus, this counter-argument presents a binary option of either the CIA or SOF; the optimum solution is to recognize the unique roles that each play and to orchestrate them accordingly.

²⁹² For a precise accounting of the differences between the CIA's covert actions and the military's sensitive activities see Mark M. Lowenthal's *Intelligence from Secrets to Policy*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE CQ Press, 2012), 181-197. For a more practitioner's view, see William J. Daugherty's *Executive Secrets: Covert Action and the Presidency* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

²⁹³ The 9/11 Commission Report, *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 415-416.

The fourth counter-argument is that the current military structure can adequately consider UW options; it just did not occur in this anomalous case. Although one may want to believe this – the status quo structure works – the events described in the earlier chapters of this dissertation show this is not the case. However, if you accept General Votel’s earlier argument that UW does work, then apparently the structure is sufficient. It seems like the current structure can work at times, and if so, why and how? For now, let me set this argument aside until the synthesis section of this chapter and the following chapter. There is more to this point than meets the eye, but it is important to provide a complete and holistic look at the research question, hypothesis, and the findings that were exposed in the previous two chapters. This can best be done in the following chapter. The structural-functionalist and cultural-bureaucracy frame is necessary to answer the research question, but it may not be sufficient to completely address the issue.

In sum, these four counter-arguments are important to consider and address. The first, that MSRA/UW national security options rarely succeed, is shown to be not quite true. The cited study does point to an important fact that when US advisors are embedded with the resistance forces, the degree of success was markedly higher. The second counter-argument that the president ultimately did decide to support to the resistance with an MSRA/UW option is shown to be false. The president decided to provide a military “train and equip” program, with restrictions against sending advisors across the border into Syria and constraining the resistance elements to purely counter-ISIS objectives. By

definition, a UW mission is intended to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power; consequently, the train and equip program was not UW. The third counter-argument, that this paramilitary realm should be the exclusive domain of the CIA, is also shown to be too simplistic. Both the CIA and the SOF have complementary roles in this important MSRA/UW arena.

However, the fourth counterargument – that the current US military structure can adequately support UW planning and activities – deserves further study.

Although this dissertation makes a compelling case to the contrary, it is irrefutable that the US has conducted some successful MSRA/UW activities, as General Votel has pointed out. So it seems that addressing the structural-functionalism and cultural-bureaucracy issues described in chapter four are necessary, perhaps they are insufficient to fully address this issue. I will return to this point in the concluding section of this chapter after the review of the rival hypotheses.

Rival Hypotheses

As previewed in Chapter One, there are two rival hypotheses that need to be addressed. In the analysis below, it is clear that the research evidence best supports the original hypothesis and not the rival hypotheses. However, over time as more information concerning the interagency decision-making proceedings on the Syria issue becomes declassified, perhaps the new information will challenge this dissertation's findings and conclusions. Future researchers interested in this topic should be attuned for such information releases. Of particular note would be any new public statements or

newly declassified documents from the now retired generals, Martin Dempsey and James Mattis. Mattis was the commanding general of the US Central Command from August 2010 through March 2013 and became the Secretary of Defense in 2017. His public statements and writings concerning Syria during this time frame of 2011-2014 have been very sparse and worded at such a general level as to not shed any meaningful light on this research question – at least at the time of writing this dissertation in 2017.

With the above as prelude, the two rival hypotheses are:

- Presidential guidance pre-empted any consideration of MSRA
- DoD leaders deliberately suppressed the MSRA/UW option and did not present it to the NSC

Rival Hypothesis #1: Presidential Guidance Pre-Empted any Consideration of MSRA.

Under this rival hypothesis, the president would have provided guidance to the NSC principals or military senior leaders to not surface any MSRA/UW options. I found no evidence to support this hypothesis, although it is true that the president was reluctant to get involved in Syria.

President Obama won the election while running on a platform that included ending the existing wars and stopping perceived adventurous and interventionist military policies. To this end, the president might also have concluded that the resistance elements could not win, and even if they did, they would not be able to secure a peace given the rising extremist forces and likely opposition from Iran. Such a pessimistic

assessment could have precluded any consideration for supporting the opposition. This pessimistic assessment was also reflected in surveys of the US population showing reluctance for any involvement in the Syrian conflict.

Along these lines, as discussed in chapter four, the president is known to have disapproved the recommendation from the CIA Director, which was endorsed by the Secretaries of State and Defense, to allow the CIA to provide limited arms to the resistance in September 2012.²⁹⁴ However, after the Assad regime used chemical weapons against his own people, the president changed his position and approved the CIA plan to arm the resistance in June 2013.²⁹⁵

Despite the president's initial reluctance and subsequent approval to provide limited CIA arms to the resistance, there are no indications that he provided guidance to the military to not initiate any recommendation for a military UW option. Given Clinton's and Panetta's disclosure and discussion of these debates in their memoirs, it seems unlikely they would avoid commenting on this presidential guidance to the military, if it occurred.

In an interview conducted with US Ambassador to Syria, Robert S. Ford, he stated that he had never received nor heard of such guidance from the President; however, he added he would not have necessarily known of such guidance if it did exist.²⁹⁶

It is important to review the exact words and texts that the president used to describe these events and to review the texts of the Secretaries of State and Defense in

²⁹⁴ Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 463.

²⁹⁵ Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 450.

²⁹⁶ Ambassador Robert S. Ford, former ambassador to Syria, in an interview with the author March 30, 2017.

their memoirs to see how they recorded the president's guidance and decisions. The following sections show these comments.

President Obama's Words

On October 11, 2016 the television news program *60 Minutes* interviewed the president on topics that included the Syrian moderate opposition, ISIS, and Russia's intervention in Syria. The rambling and sometimes testy interview also included topics of the presidential election and Congressional relations. But as I harvested and studied the direct questions and answers from the *60 Minutes* interviewer to the president, the resulting product presented itself as a *de facto* interview with the president on this dissertation. During that interview, the president made comments on his views of the Syrian resistance and his assessment as to what the US options were. The president framed his remarks with his goals and assessment as to how best to achieve them:

The goal here has been to find a way in which we can help moderate opposition on the ground, but we've never been under any illusion that militarily we ourselves can solve the problem inside of Syria.²⁹⁷

How the president saw this occurring is important.

Over time, the community of nations will all get rid of them (ISIS – my insertion),²⁹⁸ and we will be leading getting rid of them. But we are not going to be able to get rid of them unless there is an environment inside of Syria and in

²⁹⁷ Interview by Steve Kroft, *60 Minutes*, which aired October 11, 2015, accessed February 5, 2016, <http://cbsnews.com/news/president-obama-60-minutes-syria-isis-2016-presidential-race>.

²⁹⁸ President Obama consistently referred to these Islamist extremists in Iraq and Syria as ISIL, meaning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. By 2017 the US government standardized the label to ISIS, meaning the Islamist State in Iraq and Syria. In this dissertation, I use the ISIS label, except in the cases where President Obama is making a direct quote where he used the ISIL label.

portions of Iraq in which local populations, local Sunni populations, are working in a concerted way with us to get rid of them.²⁹⁹

In assessing the Syrian opposition, the president added:

I've been skeptical from the get go about the notion that we were going to effectively create this proxy army inside of Syria. My goal has been to try to test that proposition, can we be able to train and equip a moderate opposition that's willing to fight ISIL? And what we've learned is that as long as Assad remains in power, it is very difficult to get those folks to focus their attention on ISIL.³⁰⁰

I think it is important for us to make sure that we explore all the various options that are available.³⁰¹

When responding to a question concerning the Department of Defense's train-and-equip program for the Syrian moderate opposition – the 2014 and 2015 initiative that provided training and equipment to the opposition that agreed to fight ISIS, not Assad, and that prohibited the US trainers from crossing into Syria to become advisors – the president had this to say:

There is no doubt that it did not work. And, one of the challenges that I've had throughout this heartbreaking situation inside of Syria is, is that – you'll have people insist that, you know, all you have to do is send in a few – you know, truckloads full of arms and people are ready to fight. And then, when you start a train-and-equip program and it doesn't work, then people say, 'Well, why didn't it work?' Or, 'If it had just started three months earlier it would've worked.'³⁰²

Keeping in mind that this interview occurred in 2015, outside the scope of this dissertation time period, the following quote is important not for its reference to the Iranian and Russian presence on the ground in Syria, but for the president's comment

²⁹⁹ Steve Kroft, *60 Minutes*.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

of not “reinsert(ing) ourselves in a military campaign inside Syria”, a comment that may reflect earlier guidance he provided his military commanders. The passage reads:

America’s priorities has to be number one, keeping the American people safe. Number two, we are prepared to work both diplomatically and where we can to support moderate opposition that can help convince the Russians and Iranians to put pressure on Assad for a transition. But that what we are not going to do is to try to reinsert ourselves in a military campaign inside of Syria.³⁰³

President Obama concludes this Syrian portion of the interview with,

...the solution that we’re going to have inside of Syria is ultimately going to depend not on the United States putting in a bunch of troops there, resolving the underlying crisis is going to be something that requires ultimately the key players there to recognize that there has to be a transition to new government. And, in the absence of that, it’s not going to work.³⁰⁴

The president’s comments are significant and illuminating. Clearly, he was looking for a way to assist the resistance to not only fight ISIS but also to drive towards a political solution that transitions the government in Syria from the Assad regime to a more pluralistic government that meets the aspirations and needs of the Syrian people. The president was clear that this fight would be dependent on the support of the Syrian populace – it was their fight, not something that a conventional US military invasion could achieve on their behalf. Thus, a close reading shows a president hungry for options that could satisfy these conditions and gain the political end-state that he outlined. (This desired political end-state is covered more fully in the many State Department public statements detailed in Appendix A.)

In summary, the president’s comments certainly do rule-out any consideration for US conventional military operations inside of Syria. But a more careful reading of his

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

comments show a president searching for options that support his political objectives ground on his assessment that working with the local Sunni population would be the key to resolving the conflict. Indeed, what the president appears to be describing is a prescription for – not a proscription against – an MSRA/UW option. In the president’s words: “I think it is important for us to make sure that we explore all the various options that are available.”³⁰⁵

Secretary of State Clinton’s Words³⁰⁶

In her 2014 memoir, Hillary Clinton records the president’s guidance in the following series of passages. She recounted in a March 2012 meeting in Riyadh with GCC leaders, they “...discussed the need to do more to support the rebels in Syria.”³⁰⁷ She added that “The United States was not prepared to join such efforts to arm the rebels, but we also didn’t want to splinter the anti-Assad coalition.... Some will be able to do certain things, and others will do other things.”³⁰⁸ This statement implies a tacit understanding that the resistance potential did exist, that it was recognized by at least some of the US partners, but that the US was unwilling to directly arm that resistance. Meanwhile by August 2012, in Clinton’s words, “...the casualties in Syria climbed into

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ The following two sections – the views of Secretary of State Clinton and Secretary of Defense Panetta concerning President Obama’s guidance and decisions on arming the Syrian moderate resistance – are taken from an earlier research paper submitted to Dr. Peter Funke as part of a University of South Florida course POST 6933, Doctoral Pro-Seminar on December 9, 2014.

³⁰⁷ Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 453.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

the tens of thousands, and the crisis spun further out of control.”³⁰⁹ She continued that in the summer of 2012:

I and others on the ...national security team began exploring what it would take to stand up a carefully vetted and trained force of moderate Syrian rebels who could be trusted with American weapons.... if rebels could be vetted and trained effectively, it would be helpful....³¹⁰

Clinton described a July 2012 meeting with the then-Director of Central Intelligence Petraeus to discuss vetting, training, and equipping opposition fighters.³¹¹ She added:

Our military’s top brass was reluctant to get involved...consistently offering dire projections....”³¹² “Secretary of Defense Panetta had become as frustrated as I was with the lack of options in Syria; he knew from his own time leading the CIA what our intelligence operatives could do.”³¹³

Sometime after August 2012, Petraeus presents the plan to the President, who “worried that arming the rebels was not likely to be enough to drive Assad from power.... (with) unintended consequences to consider.”³¹⁴ Although Clinton concluded that “... the plan to arm the rebels dead in the water....”,³¹⁵ it is clear from her first-hand account of these discussions with the NSC principals that the US foreign partners recognized the Syria resistance potential by March 2012 and armed them, while the US military did not craft or present any such options for NSC consideration. Indeed, it would be Petraeus presenting such options from the CIA, with its much more limited

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 459.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 461.

³¹¹ Ibid., 462.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 463.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 464.

ability to support resistance movements under its authorities than what a military support to a resistance movement would entail.

More specifically to the point of what guidance the president may have provided, one can conclude that by the late summer of 2012 the issue of providing weapons to the resistance was back on the table for discussion in the NSC. It is at this point, with either initial guidance or confirmatory guidance from the president, that the US would not arm the resistance due to concerns that it would be insufficient to drive Assad from power and that unintended consequence might result. What is also clear in the Clinton passages is the US military's "reluctance" and "dire projections." It appears that instead of the president simply providing guidance for the military not to get involved, it was perhaps the military's "dire projections" that influenced the president's concerns over the potential to drive Assad from power without unintended consequences that influenced the president's decision-making. It would appear that the military's failure to properly recognize and assess the resistance potential – as chapters three and four show -- might have influenced the president's decision-making.

Interestingly, it may have been the military shaping the president's guidance, and not the president's guidance shaping the military's planning.

The next section reveals the Secretary of Defense's recollection of these same events.

Secretary of Defense Panetta's Words

Clinton's account of these discussions are echoed and reinforced by Leon Panetta in his 2014 memoirs. Of the 2011 and early 2012 period, he writes "We

presented a set of options to the National Security Council — ranging from...limited air strikes...protecting refugee camps and supporting regional allies....there was no strong support among the president's top advisors for direct military action."³¹⁶ He adds, "...there was little coordination between the opposition groups, and some had unsavory ties to terrorist groups.... so our initial support was nonlethal — training, for the most part, as well as supplies, but not weapons."³¹⁷ By late summer of 2012, Panetta's assessment changed. He confirmed the post-August 2012 NSC meeting that Clinton cited in her memoirs when Petraeus presented the CIA plan to provide weapons to the resistance. Panetta wrote, "I supported the idea, as did David Petraeus and Hillary Clinton. All of us believed that withholding weapons was impeding our ability to develop sway with those groups and subjecting them to withering fire from the regime."³¹⁸ "President Obama was initially hesitant.... Only after Assad used chemical weapons in mid-2013 did Obama reconsider supplying those arms, a step he approved in June of that year."³¹⁹

In summary, between March and post-August 2012, the Secretaries of State and Defense, along with the CIA Director, would change their assessments and jointly recommend arming the resistance, albeit through the limited CIA channel rather than through a military unconventional warfare option. Since the president made this decision only after Assad used chemical weapons, this refutes the contention that the US could not identify who the resistance leaders were or how to provide the weapons to

³¹⁶ Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 448.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 449.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 449-450.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 450.

the right people. Moreover, it is unclear if at this latter decision point (mid-2013) that the president now saw a way to unseat Assad and ensure no unintended consequences, the factors he previously cited for declining such an option earlier. What is clear is that the Syrian situation continued to spin out of control in 2012-2013 – all well before the Russian intervention – and the US belatedly took some MSRM activities although well below the full capability inherent in a military unconventional warfare campaign option.

The Panetta and Clinton memoirs document a president who was skeptical and leery of options to arm the resistance, who disapproved such an option sometime after August 2012, but who did approve the CIA's plan to arm the resistance in mid-2013. No evidence suggests that the president pre-emptively provided guidance to preclude the development of an MRSA/UW option. That said, it is also clear that the president did not want to commit any conventional US military forces to this conflict and this was undoubtedly shaped by domestic political concerns and his own beliefs. Nonetheless, there is no evidence to suggest that a middle ground option of unconventional warfare was ever recommended to the president in his national security council deliberations.

Variant to Rival Hypothesis #1: The Iranian Negotiations Factor

A variant to this rival hypothesis concerns the initiation of the then-confidential negotiations between the US, Iran, and others to limit Iran's development of nuclear capabilities in exchange for the relaxation of the economic sanctions. Under this scenario, the president would not want other areas of conflict to emerge between the US and Iran lest they disturb or otherwise adversely affect the ongoing nuclear program negotiations. In this case too, however, I have found no evidence supporting this

option. That said, it is possible that this is true and that President Obama was concealing or masking this factor even when he gave his interview with *60 Minutes* cited above. It also assumes that Panetta and Clinton would deliberately conceal these discussions in their memoirs; a plausible statement given the confidentiality of classified information. As a consequence, since absence-of-evidence is not evidence-of-absence, this remains an open question for future researchers. As the years pass, it is reasonable to expect at least some classified documents concerning this topic to be declassified and available to researchers. Suffice it to say at this point, I found no evidence of this option and continue to assess that the original hypothesis holds given the available information.

Rival Hypothesis #2: DoD Leaders Deliberately Suppressed the UW Option

Under this rival hypothesis, there are two independent reasons why this would have been plausible. First, concern over a looming possible war with Iran, it could be speculated, would have caused the military leaders in the US Central Command and the Joint Staff to deliberately suppress the MSRA/UW option so that they could marshal the necessary resources in advance of that possible conflict. Second, a more general war-weariness within the senior military ranks from years of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan could have led the military leaders to suppress any consideration to become involved in the Syrian conflict to include MSRA/UW.³²⁰

³²⁰ Although some might find it implausible that senior military officers would ever show war-weariness or a reluctance to use military forces, while serving twenty-seven years in uniform I did observe that many of the most combat-experienced officers, who saw the up-close horrors of warfare, tended to be the most pragmatic and conservative when it came to recommending combat options. Paradoxically, some of the senior civilian

I found no evidence to support this. However, a careful review of Panetta's memoirs and General Dempsey's testimony in March 2012 provide some indications that this hypothesis would not be true. First, as cited earlier in this chapter, Panetta wrote of providing Defense Department options in the 2011-2013 period to the NSC that included limited airstrikes and protecting refugee camps, options that would have suggested safe-zones with the associated assurances of an air defense umbrella and perhaps airstrikes to neutralize the regime's artillery, if they approached the safe zones.³²¹ Such options may be couched as "limited," but they would be resource intensive. Indeed, this approach would be more resource intensive than a classic small footprint and low-visibility UW option. So Panetta's statement does not seem to indicate a military that was protecting resources for a potential Iran conflict. In a similar fashion, General Dempsey testified in March 2012, that initial planning (a commander's estimate) was begun that included the options of no-fly zones, humanitarian relief, maritime interdiction, limited airstrikes, and the establishment of a humanitarian corridor.³²²

What the above shows is that there is no clear evidence that supports either variant of this rival hypothesis; moreover, there are some indicators that seem to suggest the opposite – at least on face value from what these senior leaders testified and wrote. Given the lack of evidence associated with this rival hypothesis, one cannot

leaders in the Department of Defense, whom never served in uniform, tended to be more hawkish.

³²¹ Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 448.

³²² *The Situation in Syria, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate*, 100th Congress, 2nd session (March 7, 2012), accessed September 23, 2014, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsy/pkg/CHRG-112shrg76271/html/CHRG-112shrg7621.htm>.

successfully argue its acceptance. The prudent researcher, however, would flag this area as a subject for further research and analysis as more documentary evidence is declassified over time.

Synthesizing the Results

I addressed two rival hypotheses in this chapter: presidential guidance pre-empted any consideration of MSRA and that DoD leaders deliberately suppressed the MSRA/UW option and did not present it to the NSC. As the analysis showed, the evidence available today best supports the original hypothesis and neither of the rival hypotheses.

However, over time as more information concerning the interagency decision-making proceedings over the Syria issue becomes declassified, perhaps the new information will challenge this dissertation's findings and conclusions. Of particular note would be any new public statements or newly declassified documents from the now retired general and current Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, the former commanding general of the US Central Command during much of this March 2011 to June 2014 period.

Perhaps more significant than the rival hypotheses are the four counter-arguments that this chapter addressed. The first, that MSRA/UW national security options rarely succeed, is shown to be not quite true. The cited study does point to an important fact that when US advisors are embedded within the resistance forces, the degree of success was markedly higher. The second counter-argument that the President ultimately did decide to support the resistance with an MSRA/UW option is

shown to be false. The President decided to provide a military “train and equip” program not a UW operation. The third counter-argument, that this paramilitary realm should be the exclusive domain of the CIA, is shown to be too simplistic. Both the CIA and the SOF have complementary roles in this important MSRA/UW arena. However, the fourth counterargument – that the current US military structure can adequately support UW planning and activities – deserves further study. Although this dissertation makes a compelling case to the contrary, it is irrefutable that the US has conducted some successful MSRA/UW activities, as General Votel has pointed out. So while it seems that addressing the structural-functionalism and cultural-bureaucracy issues described in chapter four are necessary, perhaps they are insufficient to fully understand and address this issue.

A more complete explanation of the current research question, which is focused exclusively on the early years of the Syrian rebellion, might involve a broader research question as to why and how the US government executed MSRA/UW options in such an uneven fashion. The MSRA/UW was not used in this period in Syria, but as mentioned earlier in this chapter, UW was successfully used in the early months of the Afghanistan conflict of 2001 (partnership with the Northern Alliance), the opening phase of the Iraq war in 2003 (partnership with the Kurds), the fight against al Qaeda in Iraq in 2005 (partnership with the al Anbar tribes), and in Yemen fighting al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (partnership with tribal resistance), and arguably in Syria 2015-2017 (partnership with the Syrian Democratic Forces). Why was there such an uneven application of MSRA/UW?

Although a comprehensive answer to that question is worthy of another dissertation, an initial indicator or hypothesis lies within the observation that in every case of a successful MSRA/UW option in the post-9/11 era, the US had some on the ground contact with the resistance force well ahead of time. In the case of working with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and the Kurds in Iraq, the US had face-to-face contact with those fighters for years before the conflicts erupted and the US then decided to execute the UW option. This was true too with the 2005 al Anbar uprising, the Yemeni tribal resistance to AQAP, and, interestingly enough, with the Syrian Democratic Forces by 2016. If this observation is confirmed with thorough research, the implication is that to fully optimize MSRA/UW as a strategic option for the nation, the US must be willing to establish contact with resistance elements in advance of a crisis go-to-war situation. I will elaborate on this important point in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

Careful consideration of the counter-arguments and rival hypotheses that challenged the analysis and findings of chapters three and four was vital for a proper critical analysis of this topic.

I addressed two rival hypotheses in this chapter: presidential guidance pre-empted any consideration of MSRA and that DoD leaders deliberately suppressed the MSRA/UW option and did not present it to the NSC. As the analysis showed, the research evidence available today best supports the original hypothesis and not the rival hypotheses.

Arguably more significant than the rival hypotheses are the four counter-arguments that this chapter addressed. The first, that MSRA/UW national security options rarely succeed, is shown to be not quite true. The cited study does point to an important fact that when US advisors are embedded with the resistance forces, the degree of success was markedly higher. The second counter-argument, that the President ultimately did decide to support the resistance with an MSRA/UW option, is shown to be false. The President decided to provide a military “train and equip” program not a UW operation. The third counter-argument, that these paramilitary activities should be the exclusive domain of the CIA, is shown to be too simplistic. Both the CIA and the SOF have complementary roles in this important MSRA/UW arena. However, the fourth counter-argument – that the current US military structure can adequately support UW planning and activities – deserves further research to more precisely determine other factors that stimulate or cause the successful application of MSRA options. One such factor appears to be the use of contact teams and the establishment of direct contact with resistance elements either early in the crisis or ideally in the pre-crisis phase.

As Janine Davidson, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Planning from 2009-2013, would write: “Ultimately, the output of the military’s planning process fails to deliver the type of nuanced advice in the form of creative options that the president needs.”³²³

³²³ Janine Davidson, “The Contemporary Presidency: Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making: Explaining the Broken Dialogue,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 43 no.1, March 2013, 129.

Two concluding observations surfaced during the critical analysis in this chapter: the need for contact with resistance elements before a crisis erupts and the need for “creative options that the president needs.” These are perfect segues to the next chapter, the implications for national security practitioners.

CHAPTER SIX:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY PRACTITIONERS

--“Our pilots fly combat missions in Syria at significant personal risk. It is odd that the administration prefers that risk to our people and credibility instead of first trying a middle path, that is, enabling a serious indigenous force to counter the extremist problem as well as the Assad government, which is the root cause of the problem in Syria.

--“One would wish that the CIA and the rest of the administration, with Congressional support, would use additional policy tools like serious material aid to the more moderate opposition, and perhaps even a no-fly zone, all properly conditioned, to press Assad to the negotiating table.”

--Ambassador Robert Ford³²⁴

The earliest chapters to this dissertation established the research design and the literature review, while the more recent chapters examined the arguments as to if viable and acceptable resistance force existed in Syria, and if so, why and how did the US military miss the opportunity to support them. The preceding chapter critically analyzed the counter-arguments and plausible rival hypotheses and synthesized those results. In

³²⁴ Robert S. Ford, *Wringing Our Hands and Endless Bombing Won't Help Us in Syria*, Washington, DC: The Washington Institute, June 19, 2015. Accessed at <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/wringing-our-hands-and-endless-bombing-won%E2%80%99t-help-us-syria?> on December 31, 2015.

this chapter, I now examine the recommendations from this analysis for national security practitioners, but first it is important to review the framing of this dissertation.

At some level there is perhaps an argument to be made that the strategic choice of supporting the viable and acceptable resistance in the 2011 to 2014 period would have significantly changed today's situation in Syria for the better. Without MSRA the conflict in Syria has now resulted in five hundred thousand dead³²⁵ and ten million refugees or internally displaced Syrians.³²⁶ There is now also an extensive foreign military intervention with Russian, Iranian, Iranian-sponsored proxy militias (from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq), plus Lebanese Hizballah forces fighting alongside the Assad regime. Moreover, the failure to assist the viable and acceptable resistance elements contributed to a power shift from these forces to the extremists of the al-Nusra Front by early 2013 and ultimately to the rise of the Islamic State with a sanctuary from which to plan, organize, inspire, and conduct trans-regional terrorist acts.³²⁷

There are indicators that all of the above are true and that a MSRA campaign could have mitigated and disrupted those developments. However, that was neither the

³²⁵ "The Syrian Conflict and Refugee Crisis", *The Brookings Institute*, accessed July 12, 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/flash-topics-folder/syria-conflict-refugee-crisis>.

³²⁶ Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirisci, *The Consequences of Chaos: Syria's Humanitarian Crisis and the Failure to Protect* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press), April 26, 2016. See www.brookings.edu/research/books/2016/the-consequences-of-chaos.

³²⁷ Robert S. Ford and James F. Jeffrey, *Acting Now Can Reverse an ISIS-Iran Power Grab in Iraq* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute, November 2, 2015), accessed December 31, 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/acting-now-can-reverse-an-isis-iran-power-grab-in-syria>. See also Mick Krever, *Former Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford: I could no longer 'defend the American policy,'* accessed June 3, 2014, [www.http://amanpour.blogs.cnn.com/2014/06/03/former-u-s-ambassador-to-syria-i-could-no-longer-defend-the-american-policy-robert-ford/](http://amanpour.blogs.cnn.com/2014/06/03/former-u-s-ambassador-to-syria-i-could-no-longer-defend-the-american-policy-robert-ford/).

purpose nor design of this dissertation and indeed the research and analysis here does not demonstrate the causality between an MSRA option and necessarily a more peaceful outcome for Syria today.

Instead, this dissertation focused on the US interagency and military decision-making concerning the Syrian rebellion in March 2011 to June 2014. During those early years, the president was deprived of a full menu of military options, which should have included an MSRA option. That much is argued and demonstrated in this dissertation.

Given this narrowed frame, what are the recommendations for national security practitioners today? There are five directly derived recommendations from this dissertation and two strategic level overarching recommendations synthesized from the derived analysis. The causal linkages are more clear and apparent with the directly derived recommendations, but the two synthesized recommendations are much more significant for national security senior leaders. Adopting the five directly derived recommendations is important, but only by adopting the two strategic level overarching recommendations will the US begin to make real progress in addressing the deficiencies in assessing and supporting resistance activities.

Five Directly Derived Recommendations

Before listing any of these recommendations, there should be a humbling recognition that MSRA/UW is not a silver bullet: it will not, by itself, solve such complex issues as the Syrian rebellion or civil war. MSRA/UW is just one element in a complex, interagency, and multi-national campaign conducted under the leadership and direction of the president to shape a desired outcome by coercion, disruption, or regime change,

as necessary. As harsh as some of these latter words sound, their level of violence and human suffering is far short of large-scale conventional war, revolution, or civil war. Moreover, the holistic effort surrounding an MSRA/UW option is a very complex and sophisticated undertaking; nonetheless, it is an option worthy of consideration and presentation to the senior national security decision-makers, the president included.

The following five specific recommendations are directly derived from the analysis presented in the dissertation. The reader will also see a logic chain that builds and links the first recommendation through the fifth.

Department of Defense Organizational and Process Changes

First, the Department of Defense should make organizational and process changes to ensure the inclusion of UW expertise into the decision-making process. From a structural-functionalist perspective, DoD should expand the role of the US Special Operations Command to provide commander's assessments, estimates, and courses of actions (options) for any developing situation that may require MSRA/UW options for the president to consider. As this dissertation argued, the conventional military geographic combatant commands and military services are, by structure and personnel assignment patterns, not apt to be able to produce such well crafted UW options, nor would they support this recommended change since it would be bureaucratically interpreted as infringing on their current authorities and responsibilities.³²⁸ In addition, DoD should expand the assignment of Special Forces generals to key operational decision-making positions within the Joint Staff and

³²⁸ Since 2014 there may be some movement in this regard.

geographic combatant commands. This reform should also include assigning Special Forces officers to positions within the National Security Council staff. Although these NSC assignments are not operational decision-making positions, having the MSRA/UW expertise in the NSC would also be beneficial for the effective interagency coordination of such options. All of this will likely require a modest increase of Special Forces generals and consequently more junior Special Forces officers who may then develop into the senior ranks. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, conventional military officers should receive greater education and experiences in the art of MSRA/UW so that when they are assigned to key positions in the geographic combatant commands and joint staff, they too are better able to recognize developing MSRA/UW opportunities and to craft such options.

Certainly, these recommendations will not be supported by the conventional military, just like the military reorganization inherent in the Goldwater-Nichols Act that required future generals and admirals to have assignments outside of their parent service was opposed by the conventional military services. Reforms such as this will need to be driven from either Congress or the President.

It is equally important that the US Special Operations Command broadens its vision and accepts these strategic responsibilities. As Dr. Christopher Lamb, former director of policy planning in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, wrote, US Special Operations Command “ought to focus on its historic strategic value as an independent means of combating such unconventional threats....and (Special Operations Command) must come to better appreciate SOF’s role as an independent strategic option that can be applied indirectly

in order to advise Pentagon leaders on the best means of employing SOF.”³²⁹ Dr. Lamb continued that there are times when SOF should take the strategic lead rather than simply supporting conventional forces.³³⁰ Finally, he argued, “Filtering SOF command and control through a hierarchy of conventional-force commanders does not make sense when SOF are given the strategic lead for operations.”³³¹

The Significance of the “Initial Contact” Assessment

Second, this dissertation exposes the significance of the initial contact with resistance leaders for the development of MSRA options. Consequently, the interagency and military – and primarily US Special Operations Command -- should expend more attention and effort to consider, develop, and execute such activities. Assessments provided by this contact team would then better enable the development of MSRA options. Just as significant, the contact may reveal that the resistance element is not suitable for US assistance if its political goals or operational techniques are not consistent with US policy and values. Shutting down the consideration for MSRA options in this case is just as valuable when it can intelligently remove the MSRA option from the menu of options for the president. The ability to have small, discrete engagements with resistance leaders to assess their viability and acceptability to US national security objectives, and then to be able to provide scalable supporting options

³²⁹ David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 202 and 176.

³³⁰ David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 177.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

that may include a comprehensive MSRA option, is essential to developing and providing the best military and interagency advice to the president.

More Carefully Define and Apply the “No Boots on the Ground” Mantra

Third, the overly simplistic label of “no boots on the ground” needs to be more carefully defined and applied so that it does not become a needless and harmful tool that excludes the use of contact teams and small footprint advice and assistance efforts. Arguably, the no-BOG label was originally intended to signify the deployment of conventional US military forces, like the first Iraq war in 1990-91 and the second war beginning in 2003. National security practitioners, especially those with no or limited US military experience, should either avoid using the BOG term or precisely define its use when considering options; e.g., specify no conventional troops on the ground. Given the criticality of making the initial contact with resistance leaders, as described in the preceding paragraph, the “no BOG” label becomes an unintentional instrument that stifles the development of MSRA options.

The Real Achilles Heel

Fourth, the logical extension of the preceding two key points – the significance of the initial contact and the no BOG mantra – is to focus attention on the real Achilles heel of the argument for greater MSRA activities. The Achilles heel issue is the political consideration of what would happen if extremist non-state forces were to capture US military personnel on these small unit missions. When one recalls the Islamic State’s perverse 2015 execution of Jordanian pilot Muath Safi Yousef Al-Kasasbe by burning

him to death in a cage, it is inescapable to exclude such events from considerations inside the National Security Council. Politically, is the president ready, willing, and able to deal with the resulting anger from the American people that would likely call for revenge and retribution, likely to the detriment of the planned or ongoing MSRA strategy? This is the kind of issue that needs to be intelligently understood, framed, and considered by the national security practitioners, without a sophomoric reflexive response of “no BOG.”

Expand Relationships with Foreign SOF Partners for MSRA/UW

Fifth, directly following from the above, the US should expand relationships with foreign partner nation special operations forces to not only share the burden of such activities, but also in recognition that from a cultural and linguistic perspective, our regional partners will likely have better capabilities and strengths than US Special Forces. The engagement of Emirati Special Operations Forces in Yemen and the insertion of other partner nation military contact teams early in the Libya civil war demonstrate that such capabilities already exist. Expanding this partnership – perhaps with greater US advice, assistance, planning, intelligence sharing, and equipment -- would maximize the advantages that partner nations already possess while mitigating or minimizing the “US Achilles heel” argument above.

Two Strategic Level Overarching Recommendations

The above five directly derived recommendations are necessary to address the issues uncovered in this dissertation, but they are not sufficient to address the

underlying deficiencies. There are two strategic level overarching recommendations, synthesized from the derived analysis, that need to be addressed. These recommendations are most relevant to senior national security officials; they are:

- Adapting the strategic level organization and processes in Washington
- Evolving the interagency institutional culture to support resistance activities

Adapting the Strategic Level Organization and Processes

The changes addressed in the above section dealing with DoD organization and processes are important, but such changes need to extend into the US interagency. Without a strategic level node within the Washington interagency, the changes at US Special Operations Command and the Pentagon would be like separate spinning gears not connected to the larger machine.

Within the National Security Council (NSC), there is no one organizational entity directly responsible for supporting resistance activities. Although the current and previous administrations have published national security strategies that usually include support for human rights, support to oppressed people, and, in the current strategy, the specific inclusion of advancing American influence, there is no corresponding entity within the NSC structure to orchestrate the necessary policy coordination within the USG to achieve these goals. By contrast, there is a Counterterrorism Directorate that provides the interagency policy coordination for counterterrorism and that model should be applied to the case of assessing and supporting resistance movements that are congruent with US national interests.

This new entity within the National Security Council could appropriately be called the Directorate for Assessing and Supporting Resistance Activities or ASRA. Like the other directorates within the NSC, it could convene subordinate interagency policy coordination committees (PCCs) to develop policy recommendation for the NSC deputies and principals committees. In this manner, policy to assess and support resistance activities worldwide would be more streamlined and effective. Moreover, as an NSC directorate, this entity could task the intelligence community, State Department, and Defense Department for assessments and programs to further the recognition, understanding, and support to appropriate resistance activities, congruent with US national policy objectives.

This idea is not new. During the Kennedy Administration, when the Soviet Union had, as a matter of policy, supported communist revolutionary movements in a variety of locations, including south east Asia, Kennedy found the US military and State Department to be unable to adapt to this new situation and provide effective counterinsurgency responses. Kennedy ordered the establishment of a Special Group for Counterinsurgency, a “high-level interagency committee to monitor and steer the national security community’s counterinsurgency work, including the formulation of policy and doctrine.”³³² The Special Group was successful in its formative years, but was killed in 1966, just a few years after Kennedy’s assassination.

³³² Frank L. Jones, “The Guerrilla Warfare Problem: Revolutionary War and the Kennedy Administration Response, 1961-1963.” *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Vol. 2 National Security Strategy and Policy*, edited by J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., 402-407. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012.
<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1110pdf>.

Underpinning and supporting this new NSC Directorate for ASRA, the Department of State, CIA, US Special Operations Command, and the private sector should develop a strategic partnership for planning, coordinating, and executing support to resistance activities. Although each entity has their unique functions within this umbrella topic, the synchronization of these entities is not optimized. This may be partially explained by their different albeit complementary authorities, but a more complete explanation probably deals with organizational cultures again. Those self-imposed obstacles should be reduced – fully respecting the different authorities – for the good of the nation.

Procedurally this should include an executive-level interagency cell comprised of senior officials from each of these entities that meets perhaps quarterly and as needed. Although this cell would not work directly for the NSC-ASRA, it would certainly be responsive to NSC tasks and policy guidance. The executive cell would provide guidance and direction plus set priorities in accordance with NSC-ASRA guidance. Below this executive cell would be a standing joint planning section staffed with personnel from each of these entities. This standing planning section would provide daily interagency (and private sector) coordination and surface unresolved issues to the executive level, as required. The primary utility of this planning section is to provide daily and continuous interagency coordination amongst these government entities and the private sector. Of note, these organizational and process changes would cost nothing but the will to adapt the existing billet structure and personnel to this priority. Sufficient force structure and personnel exist within these organizations to enable this evolution.

This recommendation is consistent with Dr. Christopher Lamb's earlier writings on the need for SOF's transformation: "The national security bureaucracy in Washington must adopt a more collaborative decision-making system to produce and choose among integrated strategic options, monitor progress in their implementation, and adjust and adjudicate risk rapidly in response to developments."³³³

Finally, it is time to change the label of Unconventional Warfare (UW) and MSRA to Support to Resistance Activities for use within the US interagency. Although this recommendation may seem trivial to many, it should be adopted for interagency use because the SRA label immediately establishes a much clearer foundation for interagency discussions than UW. This does not mean that the military needs to change its terms or doctrine; rather, this recommendation does argue for establishing the term "Support to Resistance Activities" into the US interagency lexicon and for the military to use this terms when discussing UW options in the interagency arena.

The interagency and our foreign partners understand the English phrase of support to resistance activities. What they do not understand is the military term unconventional warfare. The messages that this latter term conveys are 1) it must be akin to asymmetric or hybrid warfare, and 2) it is war. The first message is off-target: various tactics, techniques, and procedures may be deemed asymmetric or hybrid, but UW has a precise military doctrinal meaning of activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power. While the first message goes off-target with its audience, the second message (this is war) presents a significant obstacle when coordinating such activities

³³³ David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 240.

within the interagency. When departments or agencies perceives that this is war – indeed that word is in the title of the concept – it triggers a serious of obstacles, concerns, and issues in the civilian national security practitioner’s mind that almost outright stops any consideration of the UW option. To a diplomat, for example, the “war” option indicates that diplomacy has somehow failed – that the diplomat failed – and the situation has now turned into a war with the military as the lead US entity. This is clearly not the intent with the military’s approach with unconventional warfare, but that is nonetheless the message that is immediately conveyed to a non-military official. It would be far better to establish a more precise and clear term for discussions and coordination within the interagency – and with our foreign partners.

Evolving the Interagency Institutional Culture to Support Resistance

Activities

More important than the structural and process changes outlined above, the interagency culture must be evolved to support resistance activities. Integrated career paths, with clearly established promotion opportunities, must be designed within the military, the State Department, and the CIA to build and maintain expertise within this skill set. That expertise will be enhanced with required rotational assignments of these individual to the other departments and agencies, similar to how US military officers are expected to seek and obtain “joint tours” outside of their respective Services to advance their careers into the senior ranks and become a general or admiral. And similar to the military example here, it will likely take Congressional action to mandate such promotion

paths and quotas into law before our current department and agencies adequately adapt to these new realities.

Tailored career paths with promotions are not enough. The concept of how best to develop and use SRA as a strategic option for the nation should be further developed by a national-level institution, research center, or university.³³⁴ This might best be accomplished at universities like Georgetown or Johns Hopkins, or in partnership with military-related educational institutions like the National Defense University or the Joint Special Operations University. But it is also clear, from the organizational culture discussion earlier, that the development of this type of intellectual capital should not be exclusively resident and confined within the Department of Defense. A partnership with a DoD university would be advantageous, but the lead and primacy of the effort should be from a national-level institution, research center, or university that can better develop the intellectual body of knowledge for MSRA, plus produce civilian and military graduates who become the next generation of national security practitioners. Curricula and research areas for this institution would include the following topics (none of which figure prominently in the current US military war colleges nor the lower-level command and general staff colleges):³³⁵

- Social movement theory
- Language proficiency and cultural studies
- Creation and preparation of an underground

³³⁴ Charles Cleveland T. Cleveland, Lieutenant General, US Army (retired), (three-star Commanding General, U.S. Army Special Operations Command from 2012-2015) in an interview with the author March 27, 2017.

³³⁵ Most of the listing depicted above is from Joseph L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin, "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 1st Quarter 2016, 101-109.

- Cyber UW tools and methods
- Influence operations
- Popular mobilization dynamics
- Subversion and political warfare
- Social network analysis and sociocultural analysis
- Revolutionary warfare theory

In addition to research and publishing on the above topics, this institution should also produce graduates at the undergraduate and masters level. The degrees would be in National Security Studies with a focus on Resistance Movements. Talented civilian students at the undergraduate level and graduate level could then compete for positions within the National Security Council staff, the Department of State, CIA, and the US military and then embark on their new careers. Select mid-level officers (e.g., majors) could earn their masters degrees here in lieu of their conventional schooling at their Service staff college. Senior military officers (e.g., colonels and lieutenant colonels) could study here for one year fellowships and should receive credit for war college graduate studies, as already occurs with other universities and think tanks. Likewise, mid- and senior-level CIA and State Department personnel could earn government-funded masters degrees here, too, in combined classes with military counterparts. Of significance, this yearlong fellowship process of studying with State Department, military, and CIA professionals would tighten the interagency bonds necessary for success at the strategic level.

Chapter Summary

There are five directly derived recommendations from this dissertation and two strategic level overarching recommendations synthesized from the derived analysis.

The five directly derived recommendations are:

First, the Department of Defense should make organizational and process changes to ensure the inclusion of UW expertise into the decision-making process. From a structural-functionalist perspective, DoD should expand the role of the US Special Operations Command to provide commander's assessments, estimates, and courses of actions (options) for any developing situation that may require MSRA/UW options for the president to consider.

Second, this dissertation exposes the significance of the initial contact with resistance leaders for the development of MSRA options. Consequently, the interagency and military – and primarily US Special Operations Command -- should expend more attention and effort to consider, develop, and execute such activities. Assessments provided by this contact team would then better enable the development of MSRA options.

Third, the overly simplistic label of “no boots on the ground” needs to be more carefully defined and applied so that it does not become a needless and harmful tool that excludes the use of contact teams and small footprint advice and assistance efforts.

Fourth, the logical extension of the preceding two key points – the significance of the initial contact and the no BOG mantra – is to focus attention on the real Achilles heel of the argument for greater MSRA activities. The Achilles heel issue is the political

consideration of what would happen if extremist non-state forces capture US military personnel on these small unit missions.

Fifth, the US should expand relationships with foreign partner nation special operations forces to not only share the burden of such activities, but also in recognition that from a cultural and linguistic perspective, our regional partners will likely have better capabilities and strengths than US Special Forces.

In addition to these five directly derived recommendations, there are two overarching strategic level recommendation that should be implemented. They are:

First, the US should extrapolate these earlier five recommendations to the national strategic level as well. This includes establishing a new entity within the National Security Council, the Directorate for Assessing and Supporting Resistance Activities or ASRA. It also includes the Department of State, CIA, US Special Operations Command, and the private sector developing a strategic partnership for planning, coordinating, and executing support to resistance activities. These two initiatives are connected, with the NSC ASRA entity providing the strategic policy and guidance necessary for the strategic partners of the State Department, CIA, and US Special Operations Command to plan and execute.

Second, the interagency culture must be evolved to support resistance activities. This includes the establishment of interagency career paths and promotions for national security specialists within the US Special Operations Command, the State Department, and the CIA. It also requires the establishment of a national-level institution, research center, or university focused on assessing and supporting resistance activities to build expertise in resistance activities.

With the adoption of the above recommendations, we can begin to change the institutional cultures, the organizational biases, and the old structures to be able to provide the president a complete, comprehensive, and creative menu of options when assessing and responding to violent political crises short of conventional war.

CONCLUSION

“This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin--war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him.... It preys on economic unrest and ethnic conflicts. It requires in those situations where we must counter it ... a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.”

—President John F. Kennedy, June 6, 1962³³⁶

“We need strong, numerous boots on the ground, but we also need the right goal, the right strategy, and the right tactics. Obviously, Syrian fighters, and especially Sunni Arab Syrians, and not Americans, are best placed to confront Sunni Arab extremists in Syria.”

---Ambassador Robert S. Ford³³⁷

Between March 2011 and June 2014 an opportunity existed to disrupt the strategic partnership of Iran, Syria, and Lebanese Hizballah by supporting a viable and acceptable resistance movement within Syria that sought to overthrow the Bashar al-Assad regime. The resistance formed within the context of the social, economic, and political upheavals of the Arab Spring in general and the repressive actions of the Assad

³³⁶ Remarks at West Point to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy, accessed November 19, 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8695>.

³³⁷ Robert S. Ford, *How to Correct America's Strategy in Syria*, Washington, DC: The Middle East Institute, March 11, 2015, accessed December 31, 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/how-to-correct-americas-syria-strategy>.

forces in particular. While the US government provided non-lethal aid to elements within the resistance movement, the US did not provide any military support. Instead, by 2016 a complex civil war unfolded that included military interventions from Russia, Iran, and Lebanese Hizballah. By 2016 several hundred thousand people had died and ten million others were refugees or internally displaced.³³⁸ By late 2017, Assad was firmly in control, thanks to Russian, Iranian, and Lebanese Hizballah interventions and the constrained US response that restricted itself to only fighting ISIS. Could the US have shaped and influenced this development differently in the earlier years? If so, what implications should this have for US national security practitioners in future situations?

In this dissertation I posed the research question of why and how the US military missed the opportunity to provide military support to the moderate Syrian resistance in the March 2011 to June 2014 period. I argued that the US military's culture, structure, and process for providing advice to the president and his national security decision-making team are flawed due to the marginalization of unconventional warfare expertise. This marginalization results in inadequate consideration to applying UW as a strategic option for the nation. This inadequate planning and decision-making during the Syrian rebellion in March 2011 through June 2014 resulted in a missed opportunity to disrupt the strategic partnership of Iran, Syria, and Lebanese Hizballah and support the people of Syria. Moreover, effective support to the resistance movement arguably could have mitigated perhaps the extent of the human tragedy inherent in the death or displacement of more than half of the Syrian population that resulted by 2016. All that

³³⁸ Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Deconstructing Syria: A Confederal Approach," published September 16, 2016, accessed November 4, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/deconstructing-syria-a-confederal-approach/>

said, this dissertation was not a case study of the Syrian rebellion; rather, it was a case study on the US interagency and military decision-making process. The analysis of what could have happened with proper military support to the resistance will be a topic for a future researcher.

In this dissertation I showed that a viable and acceptable resistance force existed in Syria from March 2011 through June 2014 and that the US military conventional officers failed to recognize this development, adequately analyze its implications, and craft a strategic UW option for the senior national security decision-makers to consider. If these cultural, structural, and procedural flaws are left unaddressed, the US is likely to repeat this strategic error in the future.

In terms of research design and methodology, this dissertation was a disciplined configurative case study that used established theories to examine a case.³³⁹ More specifically, this was a single case study with macro- and micro-level process-tracing. Primary source evidence included Congressional testimonies and memoirs from the key participants in the decision-making, public statements from the White House and State Department, plus elite interviews with the US Ambassador to Syria and the Commanding General of the US Army's Special Operations Command, both serving in these roles during the 2011-2014 period. Ambassador Ford was a key participant in these events and retired Lieutenant General Cleveland is an expert in the military's structure, process, and culture concerning unconventional warfare. The resulting process-tracing charts, both macro- and micro-levels, were instrumental in identifying, placing in context, and then dissecting the decision-making that occurred.

³³⁹ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 74-76.

Two rival hypotheses were identified during the research design and four counter-arguments surfaced during the research. The two rival hypotheses postulated that presidential guidance pre-empted any consideration of MSRA/UW and that DoD leaders deliberately suppressed such an option and did not present it to the NSC. As the research and analysis in this dissertation showed, the evidence available today best supports the original hypothesis and neither of the rival hypotheses.

Arguably more significant than the rival hypotheses were the four counter-arguments that emerged during the research and analysis phases of the dissertation. The first, that MSRA/UW national security options rarely succeed, was shown to be not quite true. The study cited by the proponents of this counter-argument points to an important fact that when US advisors are embedded within the resistance forces, the degree of success was markedly higher. The second counter-argument, that the president ultimately did decide to support the resistance with an MSRA/UW option, is shown to be false. The president decided to provide a military “train and equip” program, but not a UW operation. The third counter-argument, that these paramilitary activities should be the exclusive domain of the CIA, is shown to be too simplistic. Both the CIA and the SOF have complementary roles in this important MSRA/UW arena. However, the fourth counter-argument – that the current US military structure can at times adequately support UW planning and activities – deserves further research to more precisely determine other factors that stimulate or cause the successful application of MSRA options. One such factor appears to be the use of small discreet teams to establish direct contact with resistance elements either early in the crisis or

ideally in the pre-crisis phase. This factor figured prominently in distilling the recommendations of this study for national security decision-makers.

The dissertation research and analysis led to five directly derived recommendations and two strategic level overarching recommendations synthesized from the derived analysis.

The five directly derived recommendations are:

First, the Department of Defense should make organizational and process changes to ensure the inclusion of UW expertise into the decision-making process. From a structural-functionalist perspective, DoD should expand the role of the US Special Operations Command to provide commander's assessments, estimates, and courses of actions (options) for any developing situation that may require MSRA/UW options for the president to consider.

Second, this dissertation exposes the significance of the initial contact with resistance leaders for the development of MSRA options. Consequently, the interagency and military – and primarily US Special Operations Command -- should expend more attention and effort to consider, develop, and execute such activities. Assessments provided by this contact team would then better enable the development of MSRA options.

Third, the overly simplistic label of “no boots on the ground” needs to be more carefully defined and applied so that it does not become a needless and harmful tool that excludes the use of contact teams and small footprint advice and assistance efforts.

Fourth, the logical extension of the preceding two key points – the significance of the initial contact and the no BOG mantra – is to focus attention on the real Achilles heel

of the argument for greater MSRA activities. The Achilles heel issue is the political consideration of what would happen if extremist non-state forces capture US military personnel on these small unit missions.

Fifth, the US should expand relationships with foreign partner nation special operations forces to not only share the burden of such activities, but also in recognition that from a cultural and linguistic perspective, our regional partners will likely have better capabilities and strengths than US Special Forces.

In addition to these five directly derived recommendations, there are two overarching strategic level recommendation that should be implemented. They are:

First, the US should extrapolate these earlier five recommendations to the national strategic level as well. This includes establishing a new entity within the National Security Council, the Directorate for Assessing and Supporting Resistance Activities or ASRA. It also includes the Department of State, CIA, US Special Operations Command, and the private sector developing a strategic partnership for planning, coordinating, and executing support to resistance activities. These two initiatives are connected, with the NSC ASRA entity providing the strategic policy and guidance necessary for the strategic partners of the State Department, CIA, and US Special Operations Command to plan and execute.

Second, the interagency culture must be evolved to support resistance activities. This includes the establishment of interagency career paths and promotions for national security specialists within the US Special Operations Command, the State Department, and the CIA. It also requires the establishment of a national-level institution, research

center, or university focused on assessing and supporting resistance activities to build expertise in resistance activities.

The real crux of the issue uncovered and presented in this dissertation is the institutional-cultural bias within the conventional military that created an organizational structure and decision-making process that marginalizes MSRA/UW expertise to the detriment of national security practitioners and, by extension, to the nation. The remedy is not merely a list of specific recommendations; rather, it is a focus on the idea of support to resistance movements as a national security option with strategic-level interagency organization and process changes plus a national-level institution from which to study and build expertise in resistance activities. Only then can we more readily change the institutional cultures, the organizational biases, and the old structures to be able to provide the president a complete, comprehensive, and creative menu of options to consider when assessing and responding to violent political crises short of conventional war.

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APPENDIX A:

SYRIAN REBELLION MACRO-LEVEL PROCESS-TRACING CHART

This appendix consists of two sections. The first section contains the macro-level process-tracing charts focused on the rebellion's beginning in March 2011, through the fall of Mosul in June 2014, and continuing through 2015 for some additional context that documents the Russian intervention.

Highlighted in red ink are the seven key events that provide critical insights to the interagency and military decision-making. These events are further analyzed in the micro-level process-tracing charts in chapter four of this dissertation.

Highlighted in blue ink within this macro-level process-tracing chart are the key US policy and strategy announcements from the White House and the State Department. The full text of these statements can be found in Section Two of this appendix.

The second section provides amplifying details concerning the US strategy by providing the actual texts of White House and State Department statements concerning the Syria situation. These texts clearly show the evolving nature of the US policy and strategy and provide the detail that could not be captured in the matrix chart in section one.

The two sections should be read side-by-side.

Appendix A, Section One The Chart

Purpose. This section lists more than one hundred major political, economic, and military events, actions, and activities taken by Syrian actors (the Assad regime and resistance elements), ISIS, other state actors, international organizations, and the US government on one timeline. This chart is intended to capture and depict the array of various key events throughout this conflict to allow the reader to refer to a specific event and then to see its temporal relationship to other events. This array of events is then of utility for researchers to conduct more detailed process-tracing to determine linkages and causality of key events and variables.

Time Frame. The focus of this dissertation is on the period March 2011 to June 2014. However, to evaluate the various factors and events that impacted and shaped the decision-making in that precise period, one must also examine events that occurred both before and after. To that point, the following paragraphs provide background information and set the listed events into context. Moreover, the event charts themselves extend through December 2015 only to show the reader the continued evolution of US policy.

Pre-Arab Spring Resistance Activities. In 2010, a year before the Arab Spring uprising began in Tunisia, Dr. Walid Phares published *The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East*. In this prescient work, Dr. Phares predicted the upcoming uprisings and provided a constructivist description of the various social, economic, and political underpinnings of the upcoming upheavals. Although he described the historical roots of the inevitable revolutions from the Maghreb, Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, his descriptions of Syria are illuminating for this study. Phares describes the 1982 uprising in Hama that left more than 18,000 dead, relentless regime oppression in the early 1960s, and the brutal actions of Hafez Assad.³⁴⁰ With his death in June 2000, the control of the regime passed to his son Bashar Assad and his “five security services, all involved in financial and other interests inside Syria and Lebanon.”³⁴¹ Although the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff would complain in 2012 that no one could identify moderate resistance leaders to him, Phares identified resistance leaders as early as 2010 who were opposing the regime’s oppression. Resistance leaders like Ammar Abdelhamid, Michel Kilo, Riad Seif, Farid Ghadri, Abdel Halim Khaddam, and political organizations like the National Council for the Damascus Declaration, the Social Peace Movement Party, Syrian

³⁴⁰ Walid Phares, *The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2010), 203-210.

³⁴¹ Phares, 211.

Reform Party, would form the cadre and nucleus of much of the initial resistance activities by 2012. Well before that, however, in 2006 three hundred Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals would sign the Beirut-Damascus Declaration calling for functional democracies in both countries.³⁴² Phares prophetically wrote in 2010: “When (the Syrian masses mobilize for change)...democracies around the world must stand by Syria’s civil society, all the way to a democratic revolution. No doubt about it — it is coming.”³⁴³

The Broader Regional Arab Spring Uprising. In addition to placing the Syrian uprising in its historical context of oppression and resistance since the 1960s, one must also place the Syrian uprising within the context of the regional Arab Spring uprisings that began December 17, 2010 when “Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of a local municipal office after being harassed by police officers in the central Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid.”³⁴⁴ Given the underlying political, social, and economic grievances against the many corrupt and repressive regimes throughout the region, this spark ignited the uprisings of the Arab Spring. These revolts spread rapidly to Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, with protests of various intensities in Algeria, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, and the Gulf States.³⁴⁵ From December 2010 to June 2012 approximately 90,000 people in 16 countries would die, but only the autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen would fall.³⁴⁶

Methodology

This process trace is in accordance with Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett’s prescription for the detailed narrative version of process-tracing. In this variant, “a detailed narrative or story (is) presented in the form of a chronicle that purports to throw light on how an event came about. Such a narrative is highly specific and makes no explicit use of theory or theory-related variables.”³⁴⁷ This approach is also congruent with Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel’s

³⁴² Phares, 212-217.

³⁴³ Phares, 220.

³⁴⁴ James Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10.

³⁴⁵ Brownlee, 10.

³⁴⁶ Brownlee, 10-11.

³⁴⁷ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. (Cambridge, MA: Belfor Center for Science and international Affairs, Harvard University, 2005), 210.

prescription for process-tracing.³⁴⁸ Within the chart, citations for these events are recorded in short form with full citations in the reference section.

Highlighted in blue within this macro-level process-tracing chart are the key US policy and strategy announcements from the White House and State Department. The full text of these statements can be found in Section 2 of this appendix.

Within Section 1 of this macro-level process-tracing appendix, there are listings of more than one-hundred events. Highlighted in red ink are the seven key events that provide critical insights into the interagency and military decision-making associated with the Syrian rebellion from the March 2011 to June 2014 period. These seven events are further analyzed in micro-level process-trace charts in chapter four of this dissertation. These events are:

- The senior US defense and military leaders assess that “it is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition” (February and March 2012).
- Interagency senior leaders express frustration at DoD’s thinking (mid-2012).
- President Obama rejects National Security Council recommendation for the CIA to arm the rebels (September 2012).
- Significant divergence apparent between DoD senior leaders and the US Ambassador in Syria on assessing the moderate resistance (April 2013).
- Two months later President Obama approves plan for CIA to arm the resistance (June 2013).
- In the wake of the fall of Mosul, President Obama orders the military to train and equip the moderate resistance in their fight against ISIS, not the Assad regime (June 2014).
- Congress approves the funding for the DoD train and equip operation (December 2014).

³⁴⁸ Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge, UK: University Printing House, 2015.)

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
2011			
March	<p>Syrian security forces shoot and kill protestors in the southern city of Deraa who were demanding release of political prisoners. This sparks violent unrest that steadily spreads nationwide over the following months. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p>	<p>Turkey seizes weapons and ammunition from Iranian commercial flight en route to Syria. (Will Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy in Syria</i>, 2013, 17)</p> <p>Some Iraqi officials, including Transportation Minister Hadi al-Amiri, assessed to be facilitating Iranian Revolutionary Guards Force (IRGC) arms supply flights to Syria. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 17)</p>	
April	<p>“The first public meeting of members of the Syrian opposition is held in Istanbul.” (Institute for the Study of War, <i>Syria’s Political Opposition</i>, April 2012, 12)</p> <p>“150 people sign a new national initiative for democratic change, creating the Syrian National Coalition for Change. This is the first attempt to establish an organized external leadership</p>	<p>Iran dispatches Law Enforcement Force (LEF) (part of Iran’s interior Ministry) Deputy Commander BG Ahmad Reza Radam to Damascus to provide expertise and aid for the regime crackdown. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 13-14)</p>	

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
	for the Syrian uprising.” (Institute for the Study of War, <i>Syria’s Political Opposition</i> , April 2012, 12)		
May	Syrian Army tanks enter Deraa, Banyas, Homs and suburbs of Damascus in an effort to crush anti-regime protests. President Assad announces amnesty for political prisoners. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	US and European Union tighten sanctions. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	<p>May 19, US condemns Assad regime for its use of deadly force against protestors. The US calls for democratic change. (See Appendix A, Section 2 for full text.)</p> <p>Treasury Department designates Iranian IRGC-QF Commander Major General Qassem Suleimani and Operations and Training Commander Mohsen Chizari for their role in “the violent repression against the Syrian people.” (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 10)</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
June	<p>The Assad government says that “armed gangs” in the northwestern town of Jisr al-Shughour have killed 120 members of the security forces. Troops besiege the town and more than 10,000 people flee to Turkey. President Assad pledges to start a "national dialogue" on reform. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p> <p>Elements of the Syrian opposition meet in Antalya, Turkey and form the Syrian National Coalition for Change. The opposition includes liberal, pro-Western, Muslim Brotherhood, Assyrian and Kurdish elements. (Institute for the Study of War, <i>Syria's Political Opposition</i>, April 2012, 12)</p>	<p>EU sanctions IRGC Intelligence Organization chief Hojjat al-Eslam Hossein Taeb for his involvement in “providing equipment and support to help the Syria regime suppress protests.” (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 14-15)</p>	<p>Treasury Department sanctions Iran Air and Yas Air (both Iranian airlines) for transporting military equipment and personnel to Syria. The designation described a series of flights in March 2011 that transported weapons to Hezbollah and Syria at the beginning of the conflict. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 16)</p>
July	<p>President Assad sacks the governor of the northern province of Hama after mass demonstrations there. Assad eventually dispatches in troops to restore order at the cost of</p>		<p>The US again condemns the Assad regime for its attacks against the peaceful protestors. (See Appendix A, Section 2 for full text.)</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
	scores of lives. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		
August	The Syrian National Transition Council (SNTC) forms in Istanbul with opposition elements. (Institute for the Study of War, <i>Syria's Political Opposition</i> , April 2012, 12)		
September	Burhan Ghalioun is named President of the SNTC. (Institute for the Study of War, <i>Syria's Political Opposition</i> , April 2012, 12)		In addition to the Treasury Department designations announced in June, Treasury cites 117 cargo and passenger planes for transporting arms and personnel to Syria. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i> , 2013, 16)
October	"Building on the foundation of the ... (SNTC), a comprehensive opposition council is announced. The Syrian National Council (SNC) formally declares its organizational affiliations and structure to include a General Assembly, a General Secretariat		

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
	<p>and an Executive Committee.” (Institute for the Study of War, <i>Syria’s Political Opposition</i>, April 2012, 12)</p> <p>The new SNC says it has forged a common front of internal and exiled opposition activists. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p>		
November		Arab League votes to suspend Syria, accusing it of failing to implement the Arab peace plan, and imposes sanctions. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	
December	Twin suicide bombs outside security buildings in Damascus kill 44, the first in a series of large blasts in the capital that continue into the following summer. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		
2012			

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
January	<p>“The SNC General Secretariat meets in Istanbul to extend Ghalioun’s presidency.” (Institute for the Study of War, <i>Syria’s Political Opposition</i>, April 2012, 12)</p>	<p>IRGC-QF Commander Qassem Suleimani meets with Assad in Damascus days prior to the commencement of the regime’s assault on Zabadani. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 12)</p>	<p>Early 2012 - According to then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, the NSC discusses options and limits the US response to non-lethal support. “We presented a set of options to the NSC - ranging from...limited air strikes...protecting refugee camps, and supporting regional allies. It was clear from those discussions that there was no strong support among the president’s top advisors for direct military action.” (Leon Panetta, <i>Worthy Fights</i>, 2014, 448)</p> <p>“There was little coordination between the opposition groups, and some had unsavory ties to terrorist groups....so our initial support was nonlethal - training, for the most part, as well as supplies, but not weapons.” (Panetta, <i>Worthy Fights</i>, 2014, 449)</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
February	<p>Government steps up the bombardment of Homs and other cities. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p> <p>The SNC Executive Committee meets in Doha, Qatar. (Institute for the Study of War, <i>Syria's Political Opposition</i>, April 2012, 12)</p>	<p>First meeting of the Group of Friends (more than 60 countries, UN, Arab League, EU, and others). The Group condemns Assad regime and affirms the goal of reform and democracy for the Syrian people. Calls for Assad to delegate “full authority” to his deputy.</p> <p>The Group of Friends recognizes the Syrian National Council as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. The Group agrees to increase support to the opposition.</p> <p>(See Appendix A, Section 2 for full texts.)</p>	<p>Event One (first of two parts): The senior US defense and military leaders assess that “it is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition”. (See Chapter 4)</p> <p>In an interview with CNN, the Chairman of the JCS, General Martin Dempsey, stated it is “premature to take a decision to arm the opposition movement in Syria, because I would challenge anyone to clearly identify for me the opposite movement in Syria at this point.” (Interview with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria, <i>U.S. Military Chief Dubious About Arming Syrian Rebels</i>, February 20, 2012)</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			<p>“US Department of Treasury designates the Iranian Ministry of intelligence and Security (MOIS) for providing substantial assistance to the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate for the purpose of assisting the Syrian regime in its violent crackdown on protestors.” (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 15)</p>
March	<p>The SNC General Assembly meets in Istanbul. (Institute for the Study of War, <i>Syria’s Political Opposition</i>, April 2012, 12)</p>	<p>UN Security Council endorses non-binding peace plan drafted by UN envoy Kofi Annan. China and Russia agree to support the plan after an earlier, tougher draft is modified. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p> <p>Iran provides unmanned aerial vehicles to Syria to monitor opposition forces. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 15)</p>	<p>Then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton meets with GCC leaders in Riyadh to discuss the need to support the Syrian resistance. The US was not prepared to arm the resistance. (Clinton, <i>Hard Choices</i>, 2014, 453)</p> <p>Event One (second of two parts): The senior US defense and military leaders assess that “it is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition.” (See Chapter 4)</p> <p>Secretary of Defense Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dempsey testify to the Senate Armed Services</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			<p>Committee. Panetta states, “It is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition. There has been no single unifying military alternative that can be recognized, appointed, or contacted.” General Dempsey adds that there are “...approximately one hundred groups that we’ve identified as part of the opposition....(but) some kind of coherent core...it doesn’t exist today.” (Senate Armed Services Committee Hearings, March 7, 2012)</p> <p>(Note: In March <i>The Institute for the Study of War</i>, publishes a detailed 57-page description and assessment of the various units, commanders, locations, and activities of the moderate resistance in Syria, including photos of 39 active commanders. The Institute would follow this publication with a 38-page document in April that detailed the grass-roots political opposition that was emerging in</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			Syria.) (Holiday, <i>Syria's Armed Opposition</i> , 2012)
May		France, UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada and Australia expel senior Syrian diplomats in protest at killing of more than a hundred civilians in Houla, near Homs. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	
July	Free Syria Army (FSA) bomb kills three security chiefs in Damascus; FSA seizes Aleppo in the north. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		<p>Event Two: Interagency senior leaders express frustration at DoD's thinking (See Chapter 4)</p> <p>CIA Director Petraeus and Clinton meet to discuss vetting, training, and equipping moderate opposition fighters. "Our military's top brass was reluctant to get involved...consistently offering</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			dire projections....” (Clinton, <i>Hard Choices</i> , 2014, 462) “Secretary of Defense Panetta had become as frustrated as I was with the lack of options in Syria; he knew from his own time leading the CIA what our intelligence operatives could do.” (Ibid.)
August	Prime Minister Riad Hijab defects. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	48 Iranian nationals, including IRGC unit commanders and brigadier generals, are kidnapped near Damascus, providing a glimpse of the Iranian advisory and assistance mission inside Syria. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i> , 2013, 11) US Secretary of Defense and C/JCS state that Iran is developing and training a militia named Jaysh al-Sha’bi (People’s Army) within Syria to fight on behalf of the regime. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i> , 2013, 18)	President Obama warns that use of chemical weapons would tilt the US towards intervention. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015) NSC principals began exploring options to stand-up a vetted force of moderate Syrian rebels. (Clinton, <i>Hard Choices</i> , 2014, 461)

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
Sept/Oct			<p>Sept 28th Secretary Clinton announces the US is increasing its humanitarian assistance by \$30 million to \$132 million in FY12, assisting more than 975,000 people inside Syria and 300,000 who have fled. (See Appendix A, Section 2 for full text.)</p> <p>Event Three: President Obama rejects National Security Council recommendation for the CIA to arm the rebels. (See Chapter 4)</p> <p>Director Petraeus presents the plan to President Obama who “worried that arming the rebels was not likely to be enough to drive Assad from power.... unintended consequences to consider.” (Clinton, <i>Hard Choices</i>, 2014, 463) “...the plan to arm the rebels dead in the water....” (Clinton, <i>Hard Choices</i>, 2014, 464)</p> <p>Panetta’s account of the meeting: “I supported the idea,</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			<p>as did David Petraeus and Hillary Clinton. All of us believed that withholding weapons was impeding our ability to develop sway with those groups and subjecting them to withering fire from the regime.” (Panetta, <i>Worthy Fights</i>, 2014, 449-450)</p> <p>“President Obama was initially hesitant....Only after Assad used chemical weapons in mid-2013 did Obama reconsider supplying those arms, a step he approved in June (2013).” (Panetta, <i>Worthy Fights</i>, 2014, 450)</p>
October	Syrian-Turkish tensions rise when Syrian mortar fire on a Turkish border town kills five civilians. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	Turkey intercepts a Syrian plane allegedly carrying arms from Russia. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
November	National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces formed in Qatar, excludes Islamist militias. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	Arab League stops short of full recognition of newly formed National Coalition. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	President Obama wins re-election over Republican candidate Mitt Romney.
December		<p>US, Britain, France, Turkey and Gulf States formally recognize opposition National Coalition as "legitimate representative" of Syrian people. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p> <p>US Treasury designation cites Lebanese Hizballah (LH), with support from the IRGQ-QF, supplying advisors, trainers, and direct combat fighters including snipers to Syria. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 21-22)</p>	
2013			

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
January		Syria accuses Israeli jets of attacking a military research center near Damascus, but denies reports that lorries carrying weapons bound for Lebanon were hit. Unverified reports say Israel had targeted an Iranian commander charged with moving weapons of mass destruction to Lebanon. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	
February		<p>BG Hassan Shateri, Iranian QF commander in Syria, assassinated outside of Damascus. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 10)</p> <p>Israeli airstrike destroys SA-17 anti-aircraft missile convoy in Syria. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 22)</p> <p>LH escalates its combat role in Syria, launching a coordinated ground offensive against rebel forces near al-Qusayr. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 23)</p>	State Department reiterates its support to the Syrian Opposition Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people and announces \$54 million in non-lethal aid to the Syrian opposition to build the capacity of 1500 grassroots activists from over 100 opposition councils in 10 different regions of Syria. (See Appendix A, Section 2 for full text.)

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
March	Syrian warplanes bomb the northern city of Raqqa after rebels seize control. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		<p>US and Britain pledge non-military aid to rebels. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p> <p>The administration notifies Congress of its intent to provide food rations and medical supplies to the National Coalition of Revolutionary and Opposition Forces and the Turkey-based Syrian Military Council (SMC). (Congressional Research Service, <i>Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and US Response</i>, October 9, 2015, 22.)</p>
April		<p>IRGQ-QF sponsored Iraqi Shia militia groups Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) openly acknowledge their fighters are in Syria. There has been unconfirmed media reporting of their involvement since 2012. (Fulton, <i>Iranian Strategy</i>, 2013, 23-24)</p>	<p>Secretary Kerry announces the US will double its non-lethal assistance to the opposition to \$123 million. (See Appendix A, Section 2 for full text.)</p> <p>Event Four: Significant divergence apparent between DoD senior leaders and the US Ambassador in Syria on assessing the moderate resistance. (See Chapter 4)</p> <p>US Ambassador to Syria</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			<p>Robert Ford testifies April 11th to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the State Department is training and equipping (non-lethal) over 1,500 local leaders and activists within Syria. (<i>US Policy Toward Syria</i>. Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. 113th Congress, April 11, 2013)</p> <p>However, in contradictory testimony six days later, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey testifies to the Senate Armed Services Committee that he could not identify the moderate resistance. "If we could clearly identify the right people, I would support it." (<i>The Situation in Syria</i>, Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services, United States</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			Senate, 113th Cong, 1 st Session, April 17, 2013. Accessed on line at www.gpo.gov/fdsys , September 23, 2014)
June	Government and allied Lebanese Hezbollah forces recapture the strategically important town of Qusair between Homs and Lebanese border. Rebel commanders complain that arms supplies taper off over international concerns about Islamists in the opposition camp. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		<p>Event Five: Two months after event four, President Obama approves plan for CIA to arm the resistance. (See Chapter 4)</p> <p>At an NSC meeting – in the aftermath of the Syrian regime’s use of chemical weapons against their own people – the president approves the CIA plan to arm the resistance. (Panetta, <i>Worthy Fights</i>, 450; see also Plofchan, <i>Timeline: Syrian Civil War</i>, June 2013 entry)</p>
July	Saudi-backed Ahmed Jarba becomes leader of opposition National Coalition, defeating Qatar-backed rival. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	(Note Saudi and Qatari references in adjacent entry.)	The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey, in a letter to the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Levin, lists five options that the

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			military could (vice should) provide in Syria, one of which is titled, "Train, Advise, and Assist the Opposition." (Dempsey, untitled memorandum, July 19, 2013.)
August	Chemical weapons attack kills 300 in the Ghouta area of Damascus. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		<p>August 21st the White House strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons in Damascus on this day. (See Appendix A, Section 2 for full text.)</p> <p>August 30th the White House attributes the above chemical attack to the Assad regime. (See Appendix A, Section 2 for full text.)</p>
September		UN weapons inspectors conclude that chemical weapons were used in an attack on the Ghouta area of Damascus, but do not explicitly allocate responsibility for the attack. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	Secretary of Defense Hagel reveals in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the CIA is providing weapons to some Syrian rebels under covert action authorities. (CRS, <i>Train and Equip Program for Syria</i> , June 9, 2015, 2)

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
October	President Assad allows international inspectors to begin destroying Syria's chemical weapons on the basis of a US-Russian agreement. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		
December			US and Britain suspend "non-lethal" support for rebels in northern Syria after reports Islamist rebels seize some bases of Western-backed Free Syrian Army. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)
2014 January/ February		January 31 st , in a text of a London 11 communiqué released in Geneva, senior officials from Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the UAE, the UK, and the USA called for an immediate political transition from the Assad regime to a pluralistic government. The communiqué expressed "outrage" at the "starve or surrender" strategy of the	

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
		<p>Assad regime. (See Appendix A, Section 2 for full text.)</p> <p>UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva fail, largely because Syrian authorities refuse to discuss a transitional government. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p>	
March	Syrian Army and Hezbollah forces recapture Yabroud, the last rebel stronghold near the Lebanese border. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		
May	Hundreds of rebels are evacuated from their last stronghold in the central city of Homs. The withdrawal marks the end of three years of resistance in the city. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		Secretary Kerry meets with Syrian Opposition Coalition President Jarba to discuss “empowering the moderate political and armed opposition” while stepping up deliveries of non-lethal assistance to the leaders of the Free Syrian Army. (See Appendix A, Section 2 for full text.)

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
June	ISIS seizes Mosul, Iraq. (theguardian.com)	UN announces removal of Syria's chemical weapons material complete. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	<p>Event Six: In the wake of the fall of Mosul, President Obama orders the military to train and equip the moderate resistance in their fight against ISIS, not the Assad regime. (See Chapter 4)</p> <p>The administration requests funding from Congress to begin DoD's Train and Equip program. (CRS, <i>Train and Equip Program for Syria</i>, June 9, 2015, 2.)</p>
	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants declare "caliphate" in territory from Aleppo to eastern Iraqi province of Diyala. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, in testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, describes the best possible outcome as one in which Assad is removed from power, but with functioning state systems remaining in tact, allowing moderate Syrian forces to assume power and then take the fight against ISIS. (CRS, <i>Armed Conflict in Syria</i> , October 9, 2015, 15-16.)

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
August	Tabqa airbase, near the northern city of Raqqa, falls to Islamic State militants, who now control entire Raqqa province. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		
September		United States and five Arab countries launch air strikes against Islamic State around Aleppo and Raqqa. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	<p>Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel testifies to the HASC.</p> <p>-\$500 million is necessary to fund the training, equipping, and sustainment for the expected 5,000 moderate Syrian opposition fighters for the first year</p> <p>-The initial assistance will consist of small arms, communications equipment, vehicles, and training</p> <p>-"A rigorous vetting process will be critical to the success of this program." (US Department of Defense, <i>Secretary of Defense Testimony</i>, "Statement on Iraq, Syria, and ISIL Before the HASC." Accessed at www.defense.gov November 14, 2015)</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
December			<p>Event Seven: Congress approves the funding for the DoD train and equip operation. (See Chapter 4)</p> <p>President Obama signs into law the Congressional authorities to train and equip vetted Syrian opposition for the purposes of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Defending the Syrian people from attacks by ISIS and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition —Protecting the US, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria —Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria (CRS, <i>Train and Equip Program for Syria</i>, June 9, 2015, 3.) <p>Absent from this authority is the ability to take offensive actions against the Assad regime. (CRS, <i>Train and Equip Program for Syria</i>, June 9, 2015, 7.)</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			<p>The act also requires the administration to submit a comprehensive interagency strategy with objectives and timelines. The strategy must also address oversight and vetting procedures on the opposition. (CRS, <i>Armed Conflict in Syria</i>, October 9, 2015, 21.)</p>

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
2015			Congress defines vetting as “...assessments of possible recipients for associations with terrorist groups including ISIL, Jabhat al Nusra, Ahrar al Sham, other al-Qaeda related groups, Hezbollah, or Shia militias supporting the Governments of Syria or Iran; and for commitment to the rule of law and a peaceful and democratic Syria.” (CRS, <i>Train and Equip Program for Syria</i> , June 9, 2015, 33.)
January		Kurdish forces push Islamic State out of Kobane on Turkish border after four months of fighting. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	
March	Opposition offensives push back government forces. New Jaish al-Fatah Islamist rebel alliance, backed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, captures provincial capital of Idlib. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)		

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
May	<p>Southern Front alliance of secular and Islamist groups take Jordanian border crossing at Nassib. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p> <p>Islamic State fighters seize the ancient city of Palmyra in central Syria, raising concerns that they might destroy the pre-Islamic World Heritage site. They also capture last border crossing to Iraq. Jaish al-Fatah takes control of Idlib Province, putting pressure on government's coastal stronghold of Latakia. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p>		
June	<p>Islamic State and Kurdish fighters intensify fighting between Raqqa and Turkish border. Kurds take Ain Issa and border town of Tal Abyad; Islamic State attacks Kobane and seizes part of Hassakeh, the main city in north-eastern Syria. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i>, 2015)</p>		

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
September		Russia carries out first air strikes in Syria, saying it targets the Islamic State group. But Syrian opposition and US say it overwhelmingly targets anti-Assad rebels instead. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	
October			Administration announces a shift in focus from training and equipping Syrian opposition members in neighboring countries to equipping select vetted fighters already in Syria. (CRS, <i>Armed Conflict in Syria</i> , October 9, 2015, 23.)
December		Britain joins US-led bombing raids against Islamic State in wake of Paris suicide bombing attacks. Syrian Army allows rebels to evacuate remaining area of Homs, returning Syria's third-largest city to government control after four years. (BBC, <i>Syria Profile Timeline</i> , 2015)	FY2016 administration's request for Congressional funding includes: -\$600 million to continue the Train and Equip program -\$65 million for non-lethal assistance to vetted members of the Syrian opposition -\$160 million for non-lethal assistance to other opposition groups -\$10 million for justice sector support in opposition-held areas

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
			(CRS, <i>Armed Conflict in Syria</i> , October 9, 2015, 17-18.)

Date	Events by Syrian Actors (Assad Regime, Resistance Elements) and ISIS	Actions by other States (minus US) and International Organizations	Actions by the US Government to include Internal Decision-Making
		<p>UN Security Council passes resolution setting timetable for peace talks and formation of a unity government. Key elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Calls for ceasefire and formal talks on a political transition to start in early January —Groups seen as “terrorist”, including ISIS and al-Nusra Front, are excluded —“Offensive and defensive actions” against such groups to continue —UN Chief Ban Ki-moon to report by January 18th on how to monitor the ceasefire —Credible, inclusive, and non-sectarian governance to be established within six months —Free and fair elections under UN supervision to be held within 18 months —Political transition should be Syrian-led <p>(BBC, <i>Syrian War Milestone</i>, 2015)</p>	<p>Secretary of Defense Carter confirms US strategy of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Developing “capable, motivated, and local ground forces as the only force that can ensure a lasting victory” -Setting the conditions for a political solution to the Syrian civil war -Seeking to identify and then enable capable, motivated local forces on the ground that can expel ISIS. <p>(Department of Defense, <i>Statement on the Counter-ISIL Campaign before the Senate Armed Services Committee</i>, December 9, 2015, accessed at www.defense.gov December 10, 2015)</p>

Process-Tracing Chart References

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Appendix A, Section Two
White House and State Department Press Statements
to Accompany the Chart

Office of the Spokesman

Washington, DC

May 19, 2011

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/05/163825.htm>

accessed March 3, 2017

We reject the Syrian government's justification of its tactics as necessary to maintain "stability." The Asad regime remains the source of instability as it foments violence by meeting peaceful protests with deadly force and mass arrests. Despite the Syrian government's violent repression and blatant disregard for the human rights of its citizens, the Syrian people continue to call for their legitimate demands to be met. The Syrian people have made clear that the status quo is unacceptable and that the Syrian government must meet their legitimate aspirations and end the killing, torture, and arbitrary detentions of protestors and activists.

Executive Orders and Sanctions

Syria has been designated a State Sponsor of Terror since December 1979. An additional layer of sanctions were added in December of 2003 with the passage of the Syria Accountability Act, implemented by Executive Order 13338 on May 11, 2004. Additional sanctions have recently been added to target the human rights abuses being committed by the Syrian Government against peaceful demonstrators and their own citizens.

- President Obama signed a new Executive Order targeting the Syrian government's continuing escalation of violence against the people of Syria on May 18. President Asad was designated pursuant to this authority, among other Syrian regime officials.
- President Obama also signed an Executive Order imposing sanctions on individuals and entities committing human rights violations in Syria on April 29, including President Asad's brother and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF).
- We have closely coordinated with our allies in the European Union, who imposed an arms embargo and their own-targeted sanctions on May 9.
- We are actively considering a range of additional bilateral options for increasing pressure on the Syrian regime as the situation may require.
- The United States will use the Executive Order to designate additional senior regime officials for targeted sanctions and will be imposing travel bans on all those who

commit or contribute to human rights violations. We will hold to account those responsible for human rights abuses; no one is immune.

Actions at the United Nations

- The United States led the call for a Special Session on Syria at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on April 29, which passed a strong resolution condemning the Syrian government and calling for an investigation by the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. As of May 18, Syria has not allowed access to the High Commissioner's investigative team.
- We actively lobbied at the United Nations to prevent Syria from being elected to the UN Human Rights Council later this month. Our lobbying efforts against the wholly inappropriate Syrian candidacy successfully resulted in Syria withdrawing its candidacy on May 11. Kuwait will stand for the seat instead.
- The U.S. will call for further action in the Human Rights Council condemning the ongoing violence, torture and arrests of prisoners of conscience, calling for accountability and lifts of the restrictions on the press.

Civil Society

"Civil Society," as we know it in many countries in the region, is almost non-existent in Syria. The Syrian government has traditionally viewed intellectuals, political activists, NGOs and civic groups with suspicion – and through arrests and other forms of intimidation has deterred much of Syrian society from participating in "Civil Society." Those who have chosen to participate in defiance of the security services have often paid a terrible price.

- We support the universal human rights of citizens across the region, and have noted quite regularly our concerns when governments, including the Syrian government, fail to respect those rights. We stand up for the work of human rights defenders in all countries around the world.
- The President and the Secretary have both emphasized promoting partnerships with the Muslim World. Providing Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) support directly to the people of the Middle East and North Africa is one way the United States can help provide tools to citizens who aspire to deliver positive change in their countries.
- Through MEPI, we support efforts to expand political participation, strengthen civil society and the rule of law, empower women and youth, create educational opportunities, and foster economic reform throughout the region.
- At her first strategic dialogue with civil society, Secretary Clinton emphasized that "the United States supports democratic change," and that change is more likely to be peaceful and permanent when it involves both the government and a broad cross-section of the population. Civil society holds governments accountable, keeps them honest, and helps them be more effective. But it plays an even more fundamental role than that as it helps to strengthen the basic bonds of trust that are essential to democracy.

Press Statement**Victoria Nuland****Department Spokesperson, Office of the Spokesperson****Washington, DC****July 5, 2011**<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/07/167577.htm>

accessed March 3, 2017

The United States remains deeply concerned by the ongoing attacks against peaceful protestors at the hands of the Syrian government. The government of Syria claims it is interested in a dialogue with the opposition. Yet, its actions in cities like Hama and along the Turkish border directly undermine the credibility of its words and its initiative. Syrian security forces have once again stepped up their repression and harassment of peaceful demonstrators and opposition members. There is no justification, no excuse for the Syrian security forces to begin yet another crackdown, killing protesters and arresting people suspected of political opposition. We urge the government of Syria to immediately halt its intimidation and arrest campaign, pull its security forces back from Hama and other cities, and allow the Syrian people to express their opinions freely so that a genuine transition to democracy can take place. The international community will continue to stand with the people of Syria as they seek their universal human rights.

Fact Sheet**Office of the Spokesperson****Washington, DC****February 24, 2012**<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/02/184642.htm>

accessed March 3, 2017

1. The first meeting of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People (“the Friends’ Group”), was held in Tunis on 24 February 2012, with the participation of more than 60 countries and representatives from the United Nations, the League of Arab States, the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab Maghreb Union and the Cooperation Council for the Arab Gulf States to discuss the worsening situation in Syria.
2. The Friends’ Group reaffirmed its firm commitment to the sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of Syria. It expressed strong condemnation of the Syrian regime’s ongoing, widespread, and systematic human rights violations, including: the indiscriminate use of force against civilians; the killing and persecution of peaceful protestors; and sexual violence and ill-treatment of thousands of detainees, including children. The Syrian regime’s brutal actions over the past eleven months have led to the death of thousands of innocent civilians, caused widespread destruction, forced tens of thousands of Syrians to flee their homes, and created widespread suffering among the Syrian people. Journalists portraying the truth about what is happening in Syria have paid with their lives. The Group viewed the regime’s use of heavy artillery and tanks to attack residential areas of cities and towns as particularly reprehensible. The atrocities committed, as the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry has said, amount in some

cases to crimes against humanity.

3. The Friends' Group affirmed its goal of a political solution to this crisis that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people for dignity, freedom, peace, reform, democracy, prosperity and stability. The Friends' Group recognized that this solution should address the concern of all citizens of Syria, regardless of their religion or ethnicity. It expressed its strongest possible concern about the situation in Syria and called for the following steps to be taken as a matter of urgency:

Support for the League of Arab States

4. The Friends' Group commended the League of Arab States for their leadership on this issue and welcomed the League's actions and proposals to achieve a peaceful resolution of the crisis. It underlined the need for an immediate end to all violence and for the full implementation of the decisions and resolutions of the League of Arab States on the situation in Syria, notably resolutions 7444 of 22 January 2012 and 7446 of 12 February 2012, that, inter alia, call for the Syrian government to:

- Cease all violence and protect its population;
- Release all persons arbitrarily detained due to the recent incidents;
- Withdraw all Syrian military and armed forces from cities and towns, and return them to their original home barracks;
- Guarantee the freedom of peaceful demonstrations; and
- Allow full and unhindered access and movement for all relevant League of Arab States' institutions and Arab and international media in all parts of Syria to determine the truth about the situation on the ground and monitor the incidents taking place.

The Friends' Group noted the Arab League's request to the United Nations Security Council to issue a resolution to form a joint Arab-UN peacekeeping force following a cessation of violence by the regime as outlined above and agreed to continue discussions on the appropriate conditions for the deployment of such a force.

Political Transition

5. The Friends' Group called for an inclusive Syrian-led political process conducted in an environment free from violence, fear, intimidation and extremism and aimed at addressing the legitimate aspirations and concerns of Syria's people. The Friends' Group noted that the Syrian government's effort to impose unilaterally a set of political steps labeled as reforms would not resolve the crisis.

6. In this regard, the Friends' Group set out its full support for the League of Arab States' initiative to facilitate a political transition leading to a democratic, plural political system in which citizens enjoy equal rights regardless of their affiliations or ethnicities, beliefs or gender, including through commencing a serious political dialogue between the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition aimed at:

- Formation of a national unity government;
- Delegation by the President of Syria of his full authority to his First Deputy to cooperate fully with the national unity government in order to empower it to perform its duties in the transitional period; and
- Transparent and free elections under Arab and international supervision.

7. In this regard, the Friends' Group welcomed the appointment of Kofi Annan as the Joint Special Envoy of the UN and the League of Arab States on the Syria Crisis.

Accountability for Regime Actions

8. The Friends' Group expressed disappointment that the United Nations Security Council had thus far been blocked from responding to the League of Arab States' repeated appeals for support and for its plan to end the violence in Syria. The Friends' Group calls on the Security Council to work with the League of Arab States and other interested parties to take effective action against the Syrian regime's gross human rights violations, and to bring about an end to the violence against civilians. The Group underlined the need to end impunity and to hold those responsible for perpetrating crimes against the Syrian people to account.

9. The Friends' Group welcomed the adoption by the UN General Assembly on 16 February of resolution 66/253 which strongly condemned the repression in Syria and demanded that the Syrian regime implement the Plan of Action of the Arab League of 2 November, and its decisions of 22 January and 12 February without delay. In view of the significant support for this resolution, the Group called for the United Nations Security Council to fulfill its responsibilities on Syria by returning to this issue as soon as possible. The Group also welcomed the continued involvement of the Human Rights Council and called on the Syrian regime to cooperate fully with the independent Commission of Inquiry. It welcomed the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of 22 February 2012.

10. The Friends' Group set out its determination to continue to take relevant political, diplomatic and economic measures to press the Syrian regime to stop all acts of violence and to prevent the regime from generating further instability in the region. In this regard, participants committed to take steps to apply and enforce restrictions and sanctions on the regime and its supporters as a clear message to the Syrian regime that it cannot attack civilians with impunity. These should include:

- Travel bans on members of the regime;
- Freezing their assets;
- Ceasing the purchase of Syrian hydrocarbon products;
- Ceasing infrastructure investment in, and financial services relating to, Syria;
- To reduce diplomatic ties with the Syrian regime; and
- Preventing the shipment of arms and related materials to the Syrian regime; and studying means of restricting the Syrian regime's access to fuel and other supplies used for military purposes.

Support for the Opposition

11. The Friends' Group commended the courage and determination of Syrians on the ground, who are the vanguard of the Syrian people seeking freedom and dignity. In this context, it also praised the work of the Syrian National Council (SNC) to form a broad and inclusive body and encouraged them to continue these efforts.

12. To this end, the Friends' Group recognized the Syrian National Council as a legitimate representative of Syrians seeking peaceful democratic change. The Group agreed to increase its engagement with and practical support for the Syrian opposition. The Friends' Group encouraged the Syrian National Council to pursue its actions in a spirit of unity and to support the vision of an inclusive, prosperous and free Syria that protects its citizens and generates stability in the region, and where all citizens enjoy equal rights.

13. The Friends' Group called on the Arab League to convene a meeting around the Syrian National Council with a range of opposition groups and individuals, including those inside Syria, committed to a peaceful political transition, in order for them to agree on:

- A representative coordination mechanism for working together before, during and after a transition period;
- A clear statement of shared principles for a transition in Syria, according to relevant covenants and resolutions of the United Nations regarding human, social and political rights, as well as a commitment to a civil, representative future government that safeguards the rights of minorities.

Humanitarian Assistance

14. The Friends' Group expressed its strong concern about the humanitarian situation in Syria, including the lack of access to basic food, medicine and fuel, as well as threats and acts of violence to medical staff, patients and facilities, in some areas. It reiterated the need urgently to address humanitarian needs, and to facilitate effective delivery of assistance and to ensure safe access to medical treatment. The Friends' Group called on the Syrian government immediately to cease all violence and to allow free and unimpeded access by the UN and humanitarian agencies to carry out a full assessment of needs in Homs and other areas. It demanded that the Syrian regime immediately permit humanitarian agencies to deliver vital relief goods and services to civilians affected by the violence, especially in Homs, Deraa, Zabadani and other areas under siege by the Syrian security forces. The Friends' Group agreed that, if the Syrian regime stopped its assault on civilian areas and permitted access, it would deliver humanitarian supplies immediately. The Friends' Group also noted the serious and growing burden carried by Syria's neighbors in hosting refugees from Syria and committed to provide appropriate support and assistance in this regard.

15. To this end, the Friends' Group welcomed the United Nations' efforts to coordinate the humanitarian response, including funding, under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. The Group welcomed the Emergency Relief Coordinator's intention to visit Syria to engage with all parties to allow impartial access for humanitarian assistance. The Group also supported the establishment by international humanitarian agencies of Humanitarian Operational Hubs in neighboring countries. It welcomed the creation of the Syria Humanitarian Forum and pledged support to the body in its role as a working group to coordinate international assistance. It reinforced the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between the humanitarian response and the ongoing political negotiations.

16. The Friends' Group also declared its firm commitment to contribute substantially to rebuilding Syria in the process of transition and to support the future economic recovery of the country. To this end, the Group decided to create a working group on economic recovery and development.

17. The Friends' Group expressed their thanks and appreciation to Tunisia for hosting this international conference. The Group agreed to meet again in Turkey in the near future. The Group also agreed that the following meeting would be hosted by France.

Fact Sheet
Office of the Spokesperson
Washington, DC
September 28, 2012

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/09/198448.htm>
accessed March 3, 2017

Today in New York, Secretary Clinton announced the United States is providing nearly \$30 million in additional humanitarian assistance to help those affected by the conflict in Syria. With this new assistance, the United States is providing more than \$132 million in fiscal year 2012 in humanitarian assistance to help more than 975,000 people inside Syria and the nearly 300,000 who have fled to the safety of neighboring countries.

This newest funding from the United States will help provide critical aid to besieged communities inside Syria, and includes funding through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the World Health Organization (WHO); and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

This latest funding will be used to provide additional medical supplies and emergency medical care, including mental health care for children who are suffering severely in the midst of this crisis. This assistance will also help provide displaced children with continued access to education. The United States will also provide clean water, materials for shelter, blankets, basic household necessities such as hand soap and pots and pans, improved sanitation, and materials to help protect against the approaching winter. In some areas where markets are functioning, we will support a program for families to make housing repairs and purchase household supplies that will also infuse cash into the local economy. This funding provides assistance to Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Syrians impacted by the violence.

With this new assistance, the United States is providing more than \$132 million in fiscal year 2012 for humanitarian activities both inside Syria and in neighboring countries:

- \$48.5 million through the World Food Program (WFP);
- \$30 million through NGOs;
- Almost \$30 million through UNHCR;
- \$11 million through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA);
- \$8 million through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC);
- Almost \$4 million through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF);
- \$1.3 million through the World Health Organization (WHO);
- \$1 million through the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC);
- \$0.5 million through the International Organization for Migration (IOM);
- \$0.5 million through the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; and
- \$0.3 million through the UN Department of Safety and Security for support of humanitarian operations.¹

The United States is aggressively pursuing all feasible options to expand humanitarian

aid in Syria, utilizing both traditional and non-traditional humanitarian networks. The United States continues to pursue every available avenue to secure full, safe, and unfettered access for humanitarian organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to the innocent children, women, and men caught in the middle of the ongoing Syrian conflict.

We recognize the generosity of the Governments of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq for receiving those fleeing the violence in Syria and for hosting and providing assistance to those in need. We commend the efforts of the United Nations and other international organizations and nongovernmental organizations to ease the trauma that the conflict in Syria has inflicted on those fleeing the violence.

Patrick Ventrell

Acting Deputy Spokesperson, Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

December 24, 2012

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/12/202380.htm>

accessed March 3, 2017

The United States condemns in the strongest terms the latest vicious attacks by the Syrian regime against civilians, most notably the attack on people waiting to buy bread at a bakery in the town of Helfeya. Brutal attacks such as these show that this regime has no future in Syria. Those that commit atrocities will be held accountable. The United States calls on all parties that continue to assist the regime in executing its war against the Syrian people to end their support.

The visit of Joint Special Representative Brahimi to Damascus and his work offers an opportunity to move a political transition forward and the United States continues to support his efforts. We urge the regime to capitalize on the Joint Special Representative's efforts in order to transition to a new government and end the brutal repression of the Syrian people.

Fact Sheet

Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

February 22, 2013

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/02/205092.htm>

accessed March 3, 2017

The United States supports the Syrian people's aspirations for a Syrian-led transition to a democratic, inclusive, and peaceful Syria. The United Nations estimates that more than 70,000 Syrians have been killed in the nearly two years since unrest and violence began. In the last month alone, the number of Syrians seeking refuge in neighboring countries has risen sharply. More than 870,000 Syrians have registered as refugees since the crisis began, or are awaiting registration in neighboring countries while, inside Syria, an additional 2.5 million people remain internally displaced and 4 million people

are in need of assistance. The Syrian regime has sacrificed all legitimacy in a vicious effort to cling to power. U.S. assistance includes vigorous diplomatic support of the Syrian Opposition Coalition, nearly \$385 million in humanitarian assistance to help those affected by the conflict, and over \$50 million in non-lethal support for local opposition councils and civil society inside Syria.

Diplomatic Support

The United States continues to support the Syrian people as the Syrian Opposition Coalition sets a course toward the peaceful, democratic, inclusive future that the people of Syria deserve. We are working with other nations to further isolate the regime and support the Syrian people's calls for President Assad to step down. We and our international partners actively supported the efforts of the Syrian people to launch the Syrian Opposition Coalition in Doha in November 2012 and, on December 11, 2012, President Obama recognized the Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. The Coalition – which includes opponents of the Assad regime from across the political and ethno-sectarian spectrum – has made real progress since its founding, and is stepping up its outreach to women, minorities, religious leaders and civil society. The Coalition has also begun to develop formal structures and plans for a democratic political transition that protects the rights, the dignity, and the aspirations of all Syrians. In Paris on January 28, more than 50 countries supporting the Syrian opposition gathered to reaffirm their commitment to provide support to the Syrian Opposition Coalition and agreed on the urgent need to increase and improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including for areas outside of regime control. On February 2, Vice President Biden met with Syrian Opposition Coalition President al-Khatib in Munich. The Vice President praised al-Khatib's personal courage and leadership of the Coalition and urged al-Khatib to continue his efforts to maintain unity among the SOC leadership, to isolate extremist elements within the broader opposition, and to reach out to – and be inclusive of – a broad range of communities inside Syria.

Humanitarian Assistance

The United States, along with the international community, is tirelessly working to provide humanitarian aid to the innocent civilians affected by the brutal conflict in Syria. At the Syria Humanitarian Forum in Geneva February 19, the U.S. announced an additional \$19 million in humanitarian assistance to Syria. These new funds augment the contribution of an additional \$155 million announced by President Obama on January 29.

With this new assistance, U.S. humanitarian assistance totals nearly \$385 million to help millions of people inside Syria and over 870,000 people who have fled to the safety of neighboring countries. Over \$215 million of this total goes to address critical needs inside Syria. Our assistance is providing emergency medical care and medical supplies, food aid, and winterization supplies like blankets and heaters for those affected by the crisis, both inside Syria and those seeking refuge in the region and elsewhere. It also supports the psycho-social rehabilitation of Syrian refugees who are victims of torture and war.

U.S. humanitarian aid is being provided throughout all 14 governorates of Syria on the basis of need. It is not branded in order to ensure the safety of aid recipients and

humanitarian aid providers as well as to ensure that aid distribution is not thwarted en route. The United States is committed to using all channels to reach affected Syrians throughout the country and is working through UN, NGO, and community-based partners, as well as with the Syrian Opposition Coalition's Assistance Coordination Unit. The United States is also working closely with host governments in the region who have generously opened their borders. For more details on the United States humanitarian response to the Syria crisis and what U.S. humanitarian assistance has provided, please visit www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria.

Transition Support to the Unarmed Opposition

The United States is also providing just over \$54 million in non-lethal support to the unarmed Syrian opposition, including emergent local and national democratic institutions, and nonsectarian civic groups. This assistance includes training and equipment to build the capacity of a nation-wide network of ethnically and religiously diverse civilian activists to link Syrian citizens with nascent governance structures. This support enhances the information security of Syrian activists, human rights organizations, and media outlets and empowers women leaders to play a more active role in transition planning and peace negotiations. Activities sponsored by these funds enable local councils and grassroots organizations to respond to the needs of their communities and promotes constructive participation in the country's political transition. Over 4,000 major pieces of equipment have been provided, mostly to Damascus, Aleppo, and other areas with significant opposition presence, including communications and computer equipment, as well as generators and medical supplies, to support unarmed Syrian opposition groups strengthen civil society, media, and democratic transition planning.

Support to civil society groups and local councils includes efforts to train, equip, and build the capacity of nearly 1,500 grassroots activists, including women and youth, from over 100 opposition councils and organizations in 10 different regions of Syria; develop groups' abilities to mobilize citizens, share information, provide community services, and undertake civic functions; support interreligious and communal dialogues and encourage citizen participation in shaping the Syrian transition; and support human rights documentation and transitional justice workshops while laying the foundation for future accountability efforts.

Support to independent media projects includes assistance to community radio stations providing information for refugees about available services; training for networks of citizen journalists, bloggers, and cyber-activists to support their documentation, packaging, and dissemination of information on developments in Syria; and technical assistance and equipment to enhance the information and communications security of Syrian activists within Syria.

Assistance in support of democratic transition planning includes efforts to link unarmed opposition elements inside Syria with global supporters; support for the independent Syria Justice and Accountability Center to document human rights abuses and coordinate transitional justice and accountability efforts; technical assistance to emerging political parties; and facilitating non-sectarian Syrian activists' participation in political and economic transition planning to promote the business community's engagement in transition processes.

Fact Sheet
Office of the Spokesperson
Washington, DC
April 20, 2013

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/04/207810.htm>
accessed March 3, 2017

Following his meetings with Syrian Coalition President al-Khatib, members of the Coalition's leadership, and international partners supporting the Syrian opposition, Secretary of State John Kerry announced the United States' intention to double non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition, as well as provide additional humanitarian aid to Syrians in need.

The new non-lethal assistance underscores the United States' firm support for a political solution to the crisis in Syria and for the opposition's advancement of an inclusive, tolerant vision for a post-Assad Syria. The United States will work with the Syrian Coalition and other opposition representatives to determine how the new \$123 million in non-lethal assistance can best support their efforts to meet the needs of the Syrian people and lead the way to a political transition that will bring an end to this conflict, and build the inclusive, democratic Syria that its people deserve. This new pledge brings our total non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition and civil society groups to \$250 million.

The United States will also use a portion of this non-lethal assistance to implement President Obama's directive to provide an expanded range of support to the Supreme Military Council (SMC). We intend to expand this new support beyond military food rations and medical kits to include other types of non-lethal supplies, which would be determined in collaboration with SMC leadership.

Secretary Kerry urged international partners gathered in Istanbul, as well as all Friends of the Syrian People, to make similar pledges of assistance to the Coalition and the Supreme Military Council with the goal of reaching \$1 billion in total international support for the opposition.

In recognition of the devastating humanitarian situation as a result of the crisis in Syria, Secretary Kerry also announced nearly \$25 million in additional food assistance for the Syrian people. This aid will provide 25,500 metric tons of wheat – providing four months' supply of flour to over one million people – as well as food rations for those inside Syria and refugees in Jordan affected by the violence. The United Nations World Food Program will begin distributing the wheat to those in need in all 14 Syrian governorates as quickly as possible. The United States is the largest donor of food assistance both within Syria and for refugees in the affected neighboring countries and is providing a total of over \$409 million in humanitarian assistance for the Syrian crisis.

Press Statement

Jen Psaki

Spokesperson, Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

July 6, 2013

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/07/211569.htm>

accessed March 3, 2017

The United States welcomes the July 6 election of Syrian Coalition President Ahmed Assi al-Jarba, and looks forward to working with him and with his team. We hope to make progress together with President Jarba to prevent the total collapse of Syria into chaos and rebuild its social fabric.

We look to President Jarba and the new leaders to reach out to all Syrian communities and bring greater unity of purpose and further organization to the Syrian Coalition as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people.

A united opposition is essential to achieve a negotiated political solution in which Bashar al-Assad steps down, and a new transition government leads all Syrians to dignity, freedom and hope for the future.

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

August 21, 2013

Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Josh Earnest on Allegations of Chemical Weapons Use in Syria

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/21/statement-principal-deputy-press-secretary-josh-earnest-allegations-chem>

accessed March 3, 2017

The United States is deeply concerned by reports that hundreds of Syrian civilians have been killed in an attack by Syrian government forces, including by the use of chemical weapons, near Damascus earlier today. We are working urgently to gather additional information.

The United States strongly condemns any and all use of chemical weapons. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. Today, we are formally requesting that the United Nations urgently investigate this new allegation. The UN investigative team, which is currently in Syria, is prepared to do so, and that is consistent with its purpose and mandate. For the UN's efforts to be credible, they must have immediate access to witnesses and affected individuals, and have the ability to examine and collect physical evidence without any interference or manipulation from the Syrian government. If the Syrian government has nothing to hide and is truly committed to an impartial and credible investigation of chemical weapons use in Syria, it will facilitate the UN team's immediate and unfettered access to this site. We have also called for urgent consultations in the UN Security Council to discuss these allegations and to call for the Syrian government to provide immediate access to the UN

investigative team. The United States urges all Syrian parties including the government and opposition, to provide immediate access to any and all sites of importance to the investigation and to ensure security for the UN investigative team.

**The White House
Office of the Press Secretary
For Immediate Release
August 30, 2013**

Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/30/government-assessment-syrian-government-s-use-chemical-weapons-august-21>
accessed March 3, 2017

The United States Government assesses with high confidence that the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs on August 21, 2013. We further assess that the regime used a nerve agent in the attack. These all-source assessments are based on human, signals, and geospatial intelligence as well as a significant body of open source reporting. Our classified assessments have been shared with the U.S. Congress and key international partners. To protect sources and methods, we cannot publicly release all available intelligence – but what follows is an unclassified summary of the U.S. Intelligence Community's analysis of what took place. Syrian Government Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21

A large body of independent sources indicates that a chemical weapons attack took place in the Damascus suburbs on August 21. In addition to U.S. intelligence information, there are accounts from international and Syrian medical personnel; videos; witness accounts; thousands of social media reports from at least 12 different locations in the Damascus area; journalist accounts; and reports from highly credible nongovernmental organizations.

A preliminary U.S. government assessment determined that 1,429 people were killed in the chemical weapons attack, including at least 426 children, though this assessment will certainly evolve as we obtain more information.

We assess with high confidence that the Syrian government carried out the chemical weapons attack against opposition elements in the Damascus suburbs on August 21. We assess that the scenario in which the opposition executed the attack on August 21 is highly unlikely. The body of information used to make this assessment includes intelligence pertaining to the regime's preparations for this attack and its means of delivery, multiple streams of intelligence about the attack itself and its effect, our post-attack observations, and the differences between the capabilities of the regime and the opposition. Our high confidence assessment is the strongest position that the U.S. Intelligence Community can take short of confirmation. We will continue to seek additional information to close gaps in our understanding of what took place.

Background:

The Syrian regime maintains a stockpile of numerous chemical agents, including

mustard, sarin, and VX and has thousands of munitions that can be used to deliver chemical warfare agents.

Syrian President Bashar al-Asad is the ultimate decision maker for the chemical weapons program and members of the program are carefully vetted to ensure security and loyalty. The Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) – which is subordinate to the Syrian Ministry of Defense – manages Syria's chemical weapons program.

We assess with high confidence that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on a small scale against the opposition multiple times in the last year, including in the Damascus suburbs. This assessment is based on multiple streams of information including reporting of Syrian officials planning and executing chemical weapons attacks and laboratory analysis of physiological samples obtained from a number of individuals, which revealed exposure to sarin. We assess that the opposition has not used chemical weapons.

The Syrian regime has the types of munitions that we assess were used to carry out the attack on August 21, and has the ability to strike simultaneously in multiple locations.

We have seen no indication that the opposition has carried out a large-scale, coordinated rocket and artillery attack like the one that occurred on August 21.

We assess that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons over the last year primarily to gain the upper hand or break a stalemate in areas where it has struggled to seize and hold strategically valuable territory. In this regard, we continue to judge that the Syrian regime views chemical weapons as one of many tools in its arsenal, including air power and ballistic missiles, which they indiscriminately use against the opposition.

The Syrian regime has initiated an effort to rid the Damascus suburbs of opposition forces using the area as a base to stage attacks against regime targets in the capital. The regime has failed to clear dozens of Damascus neighborhoods of opposition elements, including neighborhoods targeted on August 21, despite employing nearly all of its conventional weapons systems. We assess that the regime's frustration with its inability to secure large portions of Damascus may have contributed to its decision to use chemical weapons on August 21.

Preparation:

We have intelligence that leads us to assess that Syrian chemical weapons personnel – including personnel assessed to be associated with the SSRC – were preparing chemical munitions prior to the attack. In the three days prior to the attack, we collected streams of human, signals and geospatial intelligence that reveal regime activities that we assess were associated with preparations for a chemical weapons attack.

Syrian chemical weapons personnel were operating in the Damascus suburb of 'Adra from Sunday, August 18 until early in the morning on Wednesday, August 21 near an area that the regime uses to mix chemical weapons, including sarin. On August 21, a Syrian regime element prepared for a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus area, including through the utilization of gas masks. Our intelligence sources in the Damascus area did not detect any indications in the days prior to the attack that opposition affiliates were planning to use chemical weapons.

The Attack:

Multiple streams of intelligence indicate that the regime executed a rocket and artillery attack against the Damascus suburbs in the early hours of August 21. Satellite detections corroborate that attacks from a regime-controlled area struck neighborhoods where the chemical attacks reportedly occurred – including Kafr Batna, Jawbar, ‘Ayn Tarma, Darayya, and Mu’addamiyah. This includes the detection of rocket launches from regime controlled territory early in the morning, approximately 90 minutes before the first report of a chemical attack appeared in social media. The lack of flight activity or missile launches also leads us to conclude that the regime used rockets in the attack. Local social media reports of a chemical attack in the Damascus suburbs began at 2:30 a.m. local time on August 21. Within the next four hours there were thousands of social media reports on this attack from at least 12 different locations in the Damascus area. Multiple accounts described chemical-filled rockets impacting opposition-controlled areas.

Three hospitals in the Damascus area received approximately 3,600 patients displaying symptoms consistent with nerve agent exposure in less than three hours on the morning of August 21, according to a highly credible international humanitarian organization. The reported symptoms, and the epidemiological pattern of events – characterized by the massive influx of patients in a short period of time, the origin of the patients, and the contamination of medical and first aid workers – were consistent with mass exposure to a nerve agent. We also received reports from international and Syrian medical personnel on the ground.

We have identified one hundred videos attributed to the attack, many of which show large numbers of bodies exhibiting physical signs consistent with, but not unique to, nerve agent exposure. The reported symptoms of victims included unconsciousness, foaming from the nose and mouth, constricted pupils, rapid heartbeat, and difficulty breathing. Several of the videos show what appear to be numerous fatalities with no visible injuries, which is consistent with death from chemical weapons, and inconsistent with death from small-arms, high-explosive munitions or blister agents. At least 12 locations are portrayed in the publicly available videos, and a sampling of those videos confirmed that some were shot at the general times and locations described in the footage.

We assess the Syrian opposition does not have the capability to fabricate all of the videos, physical symptoms verified by medical personnel and NGOs, and other information associated with this chemical attack.

We have a body of information, including past Syrian practice, that leads us to conclude that regime officials were witting of and directed the attack on August 21. We intercepted communications involving a senior official intimately familiar with the offensive who confirmed that chemical weapons were used by the regime on August 21 and was concerned with the U.N. inspectors obtaining evidence. On the afternoon of August 21, we have intelligence that Syrian chemical weapons personnel were directed to cease operations. At the same time, the regime intensified the artillery barrage targeting many of the neighborhoods where chemical attacks occurred. In the 24 hour period after the attack, we detected indications of artillery and rocket fire at a rate approximately four times higher than the ten preceding days. We continued to see indications of sustained shelling in the neighborhoods up until the morning of August 26.

To conclude, there is a substantial body of information that implicates the Syrian government's responsibility in the chemical weapons attack that took place on August 21. As indicated, there is additional intelligence that remains classified because of sources and methods concerns that is being provided to Congress and international partners.

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 07, 2013

Weekly Address: Calling for Limited Military Action in Syria

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/07/weekly-address-calling-limited-military-action-syria>

accessed March 3, 2017

In his weekly address, President Obama makes the case for limited and targeted military action to hold the Assad regime accountable for its violation of international norms prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. The President realizes the American people are weary after a decade of war, which is why U.S. action would not include U.S. boots on the ground. Instead, the President has put forward a proposed authorization that is focused on his clearly stated objectives – preventing and deterring the use and proliferation of chemical weapons (CW) within, to, or from Syria, degrading the Assad regime's capacity to carry out future CW attacks, and deterring this behavior in others who would otherwise feel emboldened to use such weapons. The President acknowledged it is not a decision he made lightly, but failing to respond to such actions poses a serious threat to our national security.

Remarks of President Barack Obama Weekly Address The White House September 7, 2013

Almost three weeks ago in Syria, more than 1,000 innocent people – including hundreds of children – were murdered in the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21st century. And the United States has presented a powerful case to the world that the Syrian government was responsible for this horrific attack on its own people.

This was not only a direct attack on human dignity; it is a serious threat to our national security. There's a reason governments representing 98 percent of the world's people have agreed to ban the use of chemical weapons. Not only because they cause death and destruction in the most indiscriminate and inhumane way possible – but because they can also fall into the hands of terrorist groups who wish to do us harm.

That's why, last weekend, I announced that, as Commander in Chief, I decided that the United States should take military action against the Syrian regime. This is not a decision I made lightly. Deciding to use military force is the most solemn decision we can make as a nation.

As the leader of the world's oldest Constitutional democracy, I also know that our country will be stronger if we act together, and our actions will be more effective. That's why I asked Members of Congress to debate this issue and vote on authorizing the use

of force.

What we're talking about is not an open-ended intervention. This would not be another Iraq or Afghanistan. There would be no American boots on the ground. Any action we take would be limited, both in time and scope – designed to deter the Syrian government from gassing its own people again and degrade its ability to do so.

I know that the American people are weary after a decade of war, even as the war in Iraq has ended, and the war in Afghanistan is winding down. That's why we're not putting our troops in the middle of somebody else's war.

But we are the United States of America. We cannot turn a blind eye to images like the ones we've seen out of Syria. Failing to respond to this outrageous attack would increase the risk that chemical weapons could be used again; that they would fall into the hands of terrorists who might use them against us, and it would send a horrible signal to other nations that there would be no consequences for their use of these weapons. All of which would pose a serious threat to our national security.

That's why we can't ignore chemical weapons attacks like this one – even if they happen halfway around the world. And that's why I call on Members of Congress, from both parties, to come together and stand up for the kind of world we want to live in; the kind of world we want to leave our children and future generations.

Thank you.

Taken Question

Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

[Taken Question at the December 11, 2013 Daily Press Briefing](#)

December 12, 2013

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/218654.htm>

accessed March 3, 2017

Question: How much nonlethal assistance has the United States given to the Syrian opposition?

Answer: The Department of State is providing nearly \$260 million in nonlethal support to the Syrian opposition and the Supreme Military Council (SMC).

Fact Sheet

Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

January 17, 2014

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/01/220029.htm>

There is an updated version of this fact sheet located here [//2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/03/223955.htm](https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/03/223955.htm)

accessed March 3, 2017

The United States supports the Syrian people's aspirations for a democratic, inclusive, and unified Syria. President Bashar al-Asad has proven through his brutal and

repressive tactics that he cannot lead Syria's transition. His continued tenure only inflames tensions throughout the region and fuels extremism on both sides of the conflict.

The United Nations estimates that more than 130,000 people have been killed since the unrest and violence began over two years ago. The number of civilians fleeing Syria and seeking refuge in neighboring countries has increased sharply as violence has escalated. More than 2.2 million people affected by the conflict are now refugees in neighboring countries while, inside Syria, an additional 6.5 million people are displaced and 9.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. The UN Security Council has condemned the Asad regime's denial of humanitarian relief access to these civilians in need and urged immediate steps to facilitate the expansion of humanitarian relief operations throughout the country.

At the Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in Kuwait January 15, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the United States would contribute an additional \$380 million to Syrian humanitarian relief efforts – bringing the total U.S. humanitarian commitment to more than \$1.7 billion, the largest of any nation. These resources support international and non-governmental organizations assisting those affected by the conflict both inside Syria and across the region.

The United States is also providing nearly \$260 million in direct non-lethal support to the moderate Syrian opposition. This assistance is helping the Syrian Opposition Coalition, local opposition councils and civil society groups provide essential services to their communities, extend the rule of law, and enhance stability inside liberated areas of Syria. These funds are also being used to provide non-lethal assistance to moderate factions of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of the Free Syrian Army, which is contesting extremist groups for leadership of the struggle against the Asad regime.

Diplomatic Support to End the Conflict

Efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the Syria crisis are based on the Final Communiqué of the 30 June 2012 Action Group meeting in Geneva. The process set forth by the Communiqué is supported by the United States and the broad partnership of nations known as the "London 11" that are pressing for a negotiated political solution to the Syria conflict. The U.S. has been working vigorously to advance Syria's transition through the "Geneva II" international conference based on the Communiqué: the establishment of a transitional governing body formed by mutual consent, exercising full executive powers over all government institutions. The transitional governing body will also be charged with establishing a national dialogue, reviewing the constitutional order and legal system, and preparing for and conducting free and fair elections. Simultaneous U.S. diplomatic efforts are helping coordinate the provision of assistance with other partners and allies in support of the Syrian opposition. Diplomatic efforts also seek to further isolate the regime, both politically and through comprehensive sanctions; to support the Syrian people's calls for an end of Asad's rule; and to reinforce the Syrian opposition's vision of a democratic post-Asad Syria.

Humanitarian Assistance

The United States and the international community are working tirelessly to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by the brutal conflict in Syria. At the

Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in Kuwait on January 15, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the United States would continue to increase its humanitarian contributions for those affected by the ongoing conflict in Syria. About half of the more than \$1.7 billion in U.S. humanitarian assistance is being distributed to organizations working inside Syria, with the balance going to assist those affected by the conflict who have fled to other countries, and to the communities that host them. The United States is providing emergency medical care and supplies, shelter, food, clean water, relief supplies, access to education and protection – including activities to prevent and respond to gender-based violence – to those affected by the crisis inside Syria and in neighboring countries. U.S. assistance supports the activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other international and nongovernmental organizations, both within Syria and within the regional refugee response in Lebanon (more than \$76 million), Jordan (more than \$61 million), Iraq (nearly \$20 million), Turkey (nearly \$31 million) and Egypt (more than \$12 million). In response to growing incidents of gender-based violence during the conflict, the U.S. is also providing psychosocial support for women and children from Syria through women’s health centers, mobile clinics and outreach workers. In September 2013, Secretary Kerry launched an initiative to help humanitarian agencies hire staff and develop programs to protect women and girls in global emergencies, including Syria. The U.S. is also building awareness and support for survivors of gender based violence into its broader assistance programming for those affected by the conflict. Within Syria, U.S. humanitarian assistance is reaching more than 4.2 million people across all 14 of the country’s governorates through the United Nations, international and non-governmental organizations, and local Syrian organizations, as well as in coordination with the Syrian Coalition’s Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU). To ensure the safety of recipients and humanitarian workers and to guard against assistance being blocked while en route to beneficiaries, U.S. humanitarian assistance is often not branded or marked. The U.S. supports approximately 260 field hospitals and makeshift clinics across Syria. These facilities have treated nearly one million patients and performed more than 190,000 surgeries. To meet the need for more medical staff capable of saving lives, the U.S. trained more than 1,500 volunteers inside Syria to provide emergency first aid care. The United States continues to work closely with governments in the region hosting refugees fleeing Syria. For more details on the U.S. humanitarian response to the Syria crisis and what U.S. humanitarian assistance is being provided, visit www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria.

Non-lethal Transition Assistance to the Syrian Opposition

The United States is working in partnership with the international community to assist the Syrian opposition to meet daily needs, provide essential services, and support a transition and is providing nearly \$260 million in non-lethal transition assistance to the moderate opposition. These funds include a \$15 million contribution to the multi-donor Syria Recovery Trust Fund. The purpose of this fund is unite and coordinate international donors to help with Syria’s current reconstruction and economic needs in

liberated areas and after the formation of a Transitional Governing Body. Assistance is being provided to a range of civilian opposition activists, including local councils, civil society organizations and the Syrian Coalition (SOC) to bolster their institutional capacity, create linkages to among opposition groups inside and outside Syria, and help counter extremism. These efforts enable the Coalition to deliver basic goods and essential services to liberated communities. For example, in close collaboration with the Coalition's Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU), U.S. assistance is being used to procure equipment and critical supplies for prompt disbursement to communities inside Syria. This equipment includes generators to power water pumps and bakeries; ambulances to reinstate emergency medical services; crane, dump, and fire trucks for urban sanitation and civil defense; and water storage units to provide access to potable water. Other critical supplies provided through this assistance include educational kits for teachers, students and school administrators, winterization materials including blankets and heaters and commodity baskets for needy families. These efforts help the national-level opposition groups provide for the needs of local communities. Through a series of small cash and in-kind grants, the U.S. is helping to strengthen grassroots organizations and local administrative bodies— a foundation of democratic governance — as they step in to fill the void left by the regime and provide basic services, including emergency power, sanitation, water, and educational services to their communities. Some of this assistance is being directed to maintain public safety, extend the rule of law, and enhance the provision of justice to improve local stability and prevent sectarian violence.

U.S. non-lethal assistance includes training and equipment to build the capacity of a network of over 2,000 grassroots activists, including women and youth, from more than 100 opposition councils and organizations from around the country to link Syrian citizens with the Syrian opposition and local councils. This support enhances the linkages between Syrian activists, human rights organizations, and independent media outlets and empowers women leaders to play a more active role in transition planning. Support to independent media includes assistance to community radio stations providing news, including information for refugees about available services; training for networks of citizen journalists, bloggers, and cyber-activists to support their documentation and dissemination of information on developments in Syria; and technical assistance and equipment to enhance the information and communications security of Syrian activists within Syria. U.S. technical and financial assistance to the ACU's Media Unit is supporting the Coalition's outreach to Syrians through the internet; local, independent radio stations; and satellite television.

The United States continues to assist in laying the groundwork for accountability by supporting the Syrian Justice and Accountability Center's efforts to document violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law committed by all sides of the conflict, and by bolstering the capacity of civil society organizations to build the foundations for lasting peace. The United States also works at the grassroots levels with groups and individuals across a broad spectrum of Syria's diverse religious and ethnic communities to empower women, religious leaders, youth, and civil society to advocate for their communities, build trust, tolerance, and mitigate conflict.

In addition to this transition assistance, the U.S. has been increasing direct non-lethal

assistance to the SMC since the spring of 2013 along supply lines periodically contested by the regime or extremist fighters. To date, this includes over 408,000 halal food rations, vehicles and over three tons of medical supplies as well as planned deliveries of satellite access equipment, laptops, radio communication equipment, and medical kits to moderate SMC elements.

Assistance to the International Effort to Eliminate Syria's Chemical Weapons

The United States remains firmly committed to the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal, as outlined in the U.S.-Russia Framework and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118. The process of removing chemical weapons from Syria for destruction has begun. To this end, the United States has contributed tens of millions of dollars in assistance to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)–UN Joint Mission to safely package and remove chemical weapons materials from Syria for elimination by the international community. U.S. assistance includes outfitting a U.S. ship with proven hydrolysis technology to neutralize safely at sea the most dangerous of Syria's chemical agents and precursors. For more information please click here: [//2009-2017.state.gov/t/217199.htm](http://2009-2017.state.gov/t/217199.htm)

Additional Support for the Syrian People

To help Syrians begin to rebuild, the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued a Statement of Licensing Policy inviting U.S. persons to apply for specific licenses to participate in certain economic activities in Syria. The OFAC Statement focused on applications to engage in oil-related transactions that benefit the Syrian Coalition, or its supporters, and transactions involving Syria's agricultural and telecommunications sectors. OFAC also amended Syria General License 11 to authorize the exportation of services and funds transfers in support of not-for-profit activities to preserve and protect cultural heritage sites in Syria.

A new limited waiver of the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 authorizes the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security to process license applications for the export and re-export of certain commodities, software, and technology for the benefit of the Syrian people, including but not limited to: water supply and sanitation; agricultural production and food processing; power generation; oil and gas production; construction and engineering; transportation; and educational infrastructure.

The United States continues to engage Syrians directly, offering academic advising to young people hoping to study in the United States and opportunities to participate in State Department exchanges and other outreach programs. The State Department is also working with a range of Syrian, American, and international partners to protect Syria's rich cultural heritage – including archaeological sites, historic buildings, monuments, and collections of objects – and to halt the trade of looted Syrian cultural property in international antiquities markets. See <http://icom.museum/resources/red-lists-database/red-list/syria/> for more information. The State Department maintains an active dialogue to coordinate policy and assistance for Syria with a broad cross-section of Syrian opposition groups, including with the Syrian Coalition offices in Turkey and the United States. The American people, including Syrian-Americans, have contributed generously and have organized to provide assistance to Syrians in need.

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson
Washington, DC
January 31, 2014

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/01/221088.htm>
accessed March 3, 2017

Below is the **text of a London 11 communique**, released today in Geneva, Switzerland.
BEGIN TEXT:

On January 31, Senior Officials from **Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States**, after having met in Geneva with the Syrian opposition delegation led by the Syrian National Coalition, the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, adopted the following **Core Group communique**:

1. We appreciate the efforts of the Joint Special Representative Brahimi and his team to lay the foundations of negotiations between the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition delegations. The UNSG has convened the parties to the Geneva II Conference with the aim of achieving a political transition on the basis of the Geneva Communiqué which will preserve the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. As reiterated by the UNSG at the Montreux Conference, **the transition should begin with the formation, by mutual consent, of a transitional governing body with full executive powers, including control over security, intelligence and military apparatuses. The negotiations are to form without delay a transitional governing body with full executive powers in full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué.**
2. We welcome the courageous decision taken by the Syrian National Coalition to come to Geneva, and the constructive approach the opposition delegation has adopted throughout the first round of negotiations. We encourage the Coalition to pursue its efforts in this direction and to keep broadening the basis of the opposition delegation as well as to continue actively reaching out to all Syrians. We are fully committed to support this process.
3. The regime must adopt a clear position by endorsing the Geneva Communiqué and commit to the objective of the Conference as stated in the invitation letter of the UN Secretary General and as requested by the countries present in Montreux. The regime is responsible for the lack of real progress in the first round of negotiations. It must not further obstruct substantial negotiations and it must engage constructively in the second round of negotiations. We ask all those who have influence on it to engage to create the conditions for the process to succeed.
4. **We express outrage at the maintaining, by the regime, of its “starve or surrender” strategy which in particular deprives hundreds of thousands of people in the suburbs of Damascus, in the old city of Homs and elsewhere, from receiving food and medicine, and at the arbitrary detention of tens of thousands of civilians.** It is all the more important that the Geneva II process lead to tangible and immediate benefits to the Syrian people. We call on the international community to use all its influence to secure full humanitarian access throughout Syria without delay. The regime must let UN convoys have access to the old city of Homs, as proposed by the UN and accepted by the opposition.

5. We condemn in the strongest terms the continued use of “barrel bombs”, ballistic missiles and heavy artillery by the regime against the Syrian people, in full contradiction with the Geneva process as well as basic human rights principles.
6. We reiterate the right of the Syrian people to defend itself. In this vein, we commit to support the opposition groups respecting democratic and pluralistic values, as stated in the national covenant adopted by the opposition in July 2012, recognizing the political authority of the Syrian National Coalition and accepting the prospect of a democratic transition. We fully back the opposition groups in their action against Al-Qaeda affiliated groups. We condemn the presence of foreign fighters in Syria, both those fighting with the regime such as Hezbollah and other Iranian backed forces, and those fighting within other extremist groups. We call on the international community to do their part to ensure that the extremists don’t deny the Syrian people the opportunity to realize their democratic aspirations.
7. The Geneva II Conference aims to allow the Syrian people to control its future through a genuine political transition. It is of utmost importance that these goals should be reached.

Media Note

Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

May 8, 2014

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/05/225807.htm>

accessed March 3, 2017

Secretary Kerry met today with Syrian Opposition Coalition President Jarba at the Department of State. He and President Jarba had a productive discussion on the full range of our shared concerns in Syria, including empowering the moderate political and armed opposition, curbing the rise of extremism, completing the work of removing chemical weapons, and easing humanitarian suffering.

As part of our continued efforts to bolster the moderate Syrian opposition and help the Coalition serve the interests of all Syrians, the Secretary also discussed with President Jarba some additional measures we are taking to support the Coalition, local communities inside Syria, and members of the moderate, armed opposition. These steps include our announcement that the Coalition’s representative offices in the United States are now foreign missions; working with Congress to provide more than \$27 million in new non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition; stepping up deliveries of non-lethal assistance to commanders in the Free Syrian Army to enhance their logistical capabilities; and, as announced earlier today by the Department of the Treasury, imposing new sanctions and restrictions against members of the regime and its supporters who have suppressed the Syrian people.

Additionally, the Secretary reaffirmed to President Jarba that the United States remains committed to working towards a negotiated political solution that puts an end to the violence and ultimately leads to a representative government that is responsive to the needs of the Syrian people. The United States has led the international community’s

efforts to advance a political transition, and the Secretary commended the Coalition's commitment to that goal.

Media Note

Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

May 15, 2014

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/05/226110.htm>

accessed March 3, 2017

Following is the text of the communique agreed upon by the Ministers of the London 11 countries at a meeting held in London on May 15, 2014.

Begin text:

We the countries of the 'London 11' Core Group of the Friends of Syria denounce the Assad regime's unilateral plan to hold illegitimate presidential elections on 3 June. This mocks the innocent lives lost in the conflict, utterly contradicts the Geneva communiqué and is a parody of democracy. Under rules set by the regime, such elections will be devoid of political participation of millions of Syrians. We call on the entire international community to reject these illegitimate elections, as the Arab League, United Nations, United States of America, Turkey and the European Union have already done.

We have agreed unanimously to take further steps together, through a coordinated strategy, to: increase our support for the moderate opposition National Coalition, its Supreme Military Council and associated moderate armed groups; hold the Assad regime accountable for the terror it is perpetrating against its own people and spreading across the region, including through Security Council referral to the International Criminal Court; counter the rising forces of extremism; complete the removal of Syria's chemical weapons; and step up efforts to deliver humanitarian aid across borders and across lines irrespective of the consent of the regime. We have directed our officials to implement a Core Group action plan.

APPENDIX B:

IRB APPROVAL AND EMAIL TEXT TO INTERVIEWEES



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

2/7/2017

Konrad Trautman School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review

IRB#: Pro00029448

Title: Strategic Negligence: Why the United States Failed to Provide
Military Support to the Syrian Resistance from 2011-2014

Study Approval Period: 2/7/2017 to 2/7/2018

Dear Mr. Trautman:

On 2/7/2017, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and
APPROVED the above application and all documents contained
within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s): Protocol Document(s): [dis irb protocol version 1 .docx](#)

Consent/Assent Document(s)*: [dis irb informed consentv1 Feb1.docx.pdf](#)

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these

consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson USF Institutional Review Board

Email text to:
Ambassador (retired) Robert Ford and
Lieutenant General (LTG) (retired) Charles Cleveland
For the Dissertation
Konrad Trautman
#Pro00029448

January 31, 2017

Email From: Konrad Trautman, trautman2@mail.usf.edu
Email To: Ambassador (retired) Robert Ford and
Lieutenant General (LTG) (retired) Charles Cleveland



Subject: Request to Interview You for a Dissertation Concerning the Syrian Rebellion

Gentlemen,

I am Konrad Trautman, a PhD candidate at the University of South Florida (USF). My dissertation concerns the early years of the Syrian rebellion and I would like to interview each of you to solicit your insights into the dissertation's research question and key supporting questions. I am asking for your participation because you were key participants or observers to major elements of the research question and the supporting subordinate questions.

This is a voluntary study.

My research question is: Why and how did the US military miss the opportunity to provide military support to the moderate Syrian resistance in the March 2011 – June 2014 period?

My hypothesis is: The US military structure and process for providing advice to the president and his national security decision-making team are flawed due to the marginalization of unconventional warfare (support to resistance movements) expertise. This marginalization results in inadequate consideration for applying US unconventional warfare as a strategic option for the nation.

The three subordinate questions are:

(1) Did a moderate resistance force exist in Syria during this time?

- (2) If so, why and how did the US military miss this?
- (3) What are the implications for national security practitioners?

The specific questions I would like to ask you are listed below, but your responses may likely lead to follow-on questions. I would like to ask each of you the first three questions, with the remaining two only addressed to Lieutenant General (retired) Cleveland.

Question 1: During this March 2011 – June 2014 period in, in your judgment did the military see and understand the resistance activities and potential in Syria? If not, why not?

Question 2: During this period, did the military develop military options to support to the Syrian resistance? If not, why not?

Question 3: Did you see or hear of any indication that the president proactively or pre-emptively provided guidance to his national security team to not even consider any option to support the resistance movement? (This evidence would support the rival hypothesis.)

Question 4: Are there any bureaucratic-cultural reasons why the conventional military would not fully understand the strategic option of support to resistance movements?

Question 5: Are there any structural-functionalism reasons why the military decision-making process would marginalize unconventional warfare expertise?

Attached is a USF Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk. Please read this form, sign it if you agree to participate, and scan/email it back to me. Please also advise me on which dates and times would be best for you to conduct the interview. I intend to ask you for a phone call or a Skype interview, at your convenience.

I want to also disclose to you that in addition to being a USF doctoral candidate – the role in which I am contacting you and conducting this interview – that I am also a serving official with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). The views, opinions, conclusions, and recommendations that will develop in this dissertation are solely my own and do not represent the views of the Defense Department, DIA, the United States Special Operations Command, or any other element of the Federal Government.

If you desire to contact the USF, the identification number for this study is Pro#00029448. My contact information is trautman2@mail.usf.edu and 813-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,
Konrad Trautman

Email text to:
Senator John McCain
Major General (MG) (retired) William Rapp
Dr. Christopher J. Lamb
For the Dissertation
Konrad Trautman
#Pro00029448

October 22, 2017

Email From:
Konrad Trautman, trautman2@mail.usf.edu
Email To:
Senator John McCain
Major General (MG) (retired) William Rapp
Dr. Christopher J. Lamb



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This marginalization results in inadequate consideration for applying US unconventional warfare as a strategic option for the nation.

The three subordinate questions are:

- (1) Did a moderate resistance force exist in Syria during this time?
- (2) If so, why and how did the US military miss this?
- (3) What are the implications for national security practitioners?

The specific questions I have asked all previous participants are listed below. Based upon your familiarity with either the events in Syria during this time or the institutional cultural divides within the conventional and unconventional military elements, we will tailor the questioning accordingly.

Question 1: During this March 2011 – June 2014 period in, in your judgment did the military see and understand the resistance activities and potential in Syria? If not, why not?

Question 2: During this period, did the military develop military options to support to the Syrian resistance? If not, why not?

Question 3: Did you see or hear of any indication that the president proactively or pre-emptively provided guidance to his national security team to not even consider any option to support the resistance movement? (This evidence would support the rival hypothesis.)

Question 4: Are there any bureaucratic-cultural reasons why the conventional military would not fully understand the strategic option of support to resistance movements?

Question 5: Are there any structural-functionalism reasons why the military decision-making process would marginalize unconventional warfare expertise?

Attached is a USF Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk. Please read this form, sign it if you agree to participate, and scan/email it back to me. Please also advise me on which dates and times would be best for you to conduct the interview. We may conduct the interview by phone, Skype, or in person, at your convenience.

I want to also disclose to you that in addition to being a USF doctoral candidate – the role in which I am contacting you and conducting this interview – that I am also a serving official with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). The views, opinions, conclusions, and recommendations that will develop in this dissertation are solely my own and do not represent the views of the Defense Department, DIA, the United States Special Operations Command, or any other element of the Federal Government.

If you desire to contact the USF, the identification number for this study is Pro#00029448. My contact information is trautman2@mail.usf.edu and 813-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,
Konrad Trautman

APPENDIX C:
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See following two pages.



March 8, 2017

ISW grants Konrad Trautman non-exclusive permission to reprint the requested graphics within his PhD dissertation, enumerated below.

Holliday, Joseph. *The Struggle for Syria in 2011*. Middle East Security Report 2, December 2011.

Page 11. Map 3. 2011 Major Regime Operations

Holliday, Joseph. *Syria's Armed Opposition*. Middle East Security Report 3, March 2012.

Page 8. Map of western Syria with 8 locations of fighting

Page 15. Chart 1. The Free Syrian Army's October 12, 2011 Video....

Page 27. Photo of the Harmoush Battalion in formation

Pages 39-52. Armed Opposition Leaders and Groups

Holliday, Joseph. *Syria's Maturing Insurgency*. Middle East Security Report 5, June 2012.

Page 8. Map of western Syria with 9 locations of fighting

Page 12. Map of rebel de facto safe zone, June 2012

Page 19. Political-Military Opposition Structure

Page 20. Homs Military Council and Farouq Battalion

Page 21. Homs Military Council and Farouq Battalion

Page 23. Hama Military Council

Page 24. Idlib Military Council and Ahrar al-Sham Battalions

Page 25. Deraa Military Council

O'Bagy, Elizabeth. *Jihad in Syria*. Middle East Security Report 6, September 2012.

Page 18. Fighting elements on the spectrum of religious ideology

O'Bagy, Elizabeth. *The Free Syrian Army*. Middle East Security Report, March 2013.

Page 18. Map. Area of Operations for the Five Fronts

Page 12. Joint Command Structure

Page 17. Supreme Military Command Structure

Page 39. Opposition Groups by Front

Page 19. Select Supreme Military Command Members

Page 36-37. Who's Who -- Selected Supreme Military Command Members

Page 40-45. Major Rebel Coalitions and Brigade-Level Rebel Organizations

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kimberly Kagan', written in a cursive style.

Kimberly Kagan, PhD

President and Founder, Institute for the Study of War

APPENDIX D

GLOSSARY OF MILITARY TERMS³⁴⁹

Combatant Command — A unified or specified command with a broad continuing mission under a single commander established and so designated by the President, through the Secretary of Defense and with the advice and assistance of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Also called CCMD.

J-2 – Within a combatant command and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Staff, the staff sections are assigned “J-codes” to designate their functional staff specialty. The J-2 staff section is responsible for intelligence.

J-3 – Within a combatant command and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Staff, the staff sections are assigned “J-codes” to designate their functional staff specialty. The J-3 staff section is responsible for operations and short range or crisis planning.

J-5 – Within a combatant command and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Staff, the staff sections are assigned “J-codes” to designate their functional staff specialty. The J-5 staff section is responsible for long range or deliberate planning.

³⁴⁹ US Department of Defense, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: The Joint Staff, March 2017), accessed April 1, 2017 at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/dictionary.pdf

Special Forces — United States Army forces organized, trained, and equipped to conduct special operations with an emphasis on unconventional warfare capabilities. Also called SF.

Special Operations — Operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk.

Special Operations Forces — Those Active and Reserve Component forces of the Services designated by the Secretary of Defense and specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations. Also called SOF.

Terrorism — The unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political.

Theater Special Operations Command — A subordinate unified command established by a combatant commander to plan, coordinate, conduct, and support joint special operations. Also called TSOC.

Unconventional Warfare — Activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area. Also called UW.

Unified Command Plan — The document, approved by the President, that sets forth basic guidance to all unified combatant commanders; establishes their missions, responsibilities, and force structure; delineates the general geographical area of responsibility for geographic combatant commanders; and specifies functional responsibilities for functional combatant commanders. Also called UCP. See also combatant command; combatant commander.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Konrad Trautman is a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) senior officer. Prior to his DIA career, he served for twenty-seven years in the military in a variety of intelligence, special operations, command, and staff positions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Washington DC, Ft Bragg, and elsewhere. He served in key assignments in human intelligence and signals intelligence collection units. He commanded intelligence or special operations units at brigade, battalion, company, and detachment levels for eight years. His final assignment in uniform was as the U.S. Special Operations Command's Division Chief for Special Activities.

As a DIA executive, Trautman served as the senior intelligence officer (J-2) of the U.S. Special Operations Command from 2007-2013.

From 2014-2017 he was assigned to the U. S. Special Operations Command's Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) as the DIA Chair to the university, a senior fellow, and an instructor. Concurrent with this assignment, he was an associate instructor at the National Intelligence University. In 2017 he was designated a Distinguished Fellow at the Joint Special Operations University.

Trautman's research interests include national security studies, intelligence, support to resistance movements, and violent political struggles.